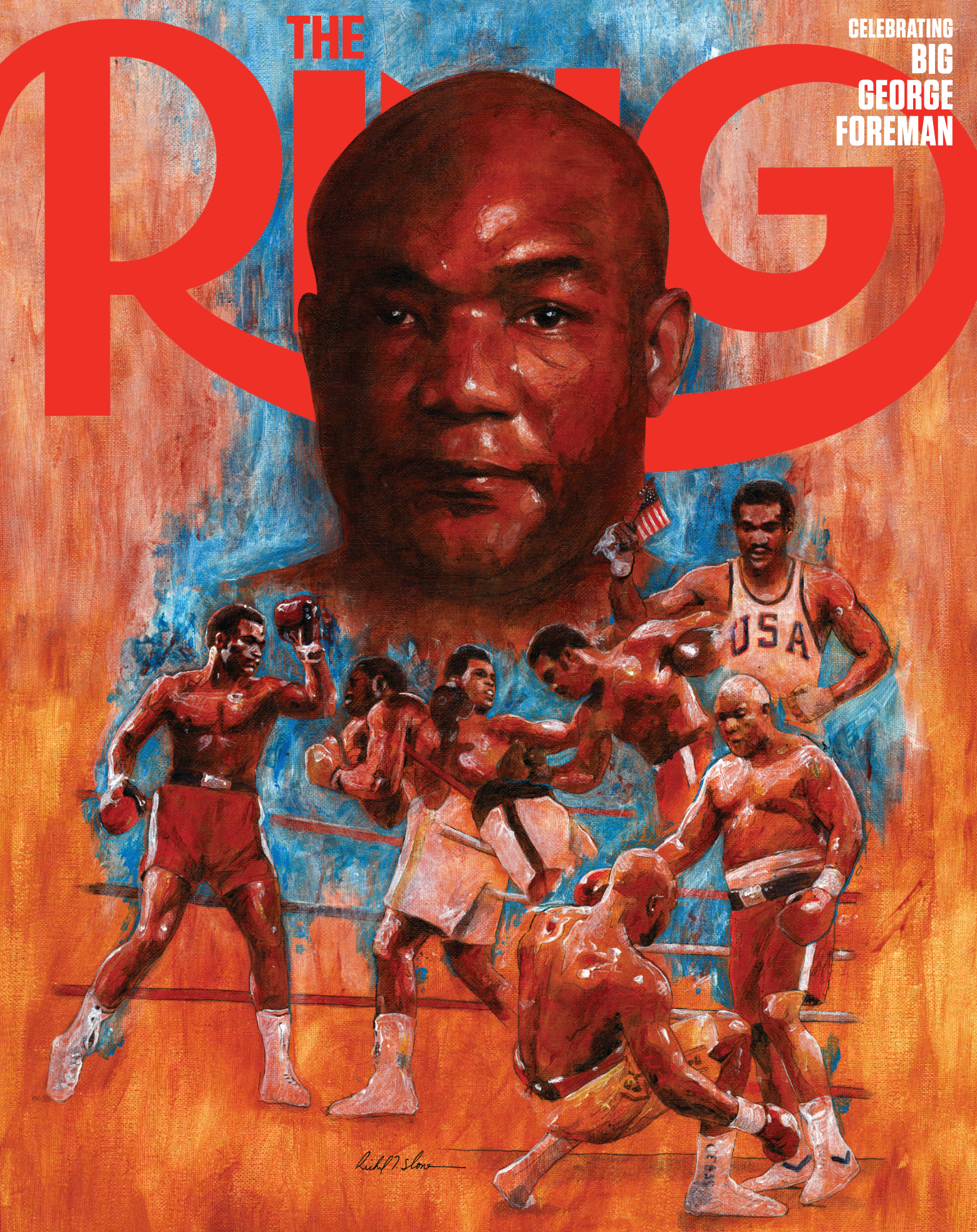
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stc

game on gloves up

How stc is Powering a New Era of Entertainment

Gaming Gone Global

The very qualities cherished by boxing fans across the world are now entering a new arena: digital combat sports. As the world becomes more connected, audiences are discovering fresh arenas to engage with their favorite pastimes – in the digital realm.

In April, SNK Games, the developers behind cult-classic Fatal Fury, partnered with Ring Magazine in a world-first. Bridging the realms of the digital world and the boxing ring, fans of Fatal Fury were given exclusive presale access to the long-awaited match between Conor Benn and Chris Eubank Jr. The event symbolized more than just a promotional crossover — it marked a turning point in the convergence of traditional and virtual combat sports. While the competitive sports of gaming and boxing colliding at the iconic grudge match, all eyes are turning towards the growing world of virtual gaming and digital entertainment as it grows in prominence worldwide.

The Fatal Fury event reflects more than just a cultural crossover between boxing and gaming fans – it signals the rising influence of digital entertainment on an international scale. And leading the change in this global transformation, is Saudi Arabia's leading digital enabler – stc group.

With 70% of the population under the age of 35, Saudi Arabia is rapidly becoming a future-focused society where technology and entertainment intersect. As part of its National Gaming and Esports Strategy, the Kingdom is investing heavily in the global gaming industry, including high-profile stakes in companies like SNK and Nintendo. The aim is to foster a thriving, locally anchored gaming culture that also drives global influence, and Saudi Arabia is already making its mark as a key player in shaping the global future of digital entertainment.

The iconic boxer, Muhammad Ali, once said, "The man who has no imagination has no wings." Boxing is one of the world's oldest sports, and yet, it has only increased in cultural prominence over the years. Innovative ways of reimagining the sport have ensured that audiences across time can continue to connect with the cut-throat and exhilarating world of boxing. Much like boxing, gaming is being reimagined to unprecedented levels and a new era is taking flight. In 2024, Saudi Arabia held the first-ever Esports World Cup, and stc group played a central role as its Elite and Founding Partners. From powering the event's connectivity, to ensuring flawless live broadcast coverage through its advanced network infrastructure, stc enabled fans worldwide to experience the tournament in real time, no matter where you may be.

The Esports World Cup was one of the most-watched events in the world – a milestone made possible by stc's unmatched digital capabilities. Leveraging its extensive network, broadcast outlets, and digital connectivity capabilities, stc group ensured that fans around the world could witness the new era of digital entertainment with just the tap of a screen. It demonstrated that Esports, like boxing, can deliver high-intensity competition, crowd-pulling drama, and cultural impact on a global scale.

The world is beginning to grasp a new meaning behind Saudi Arabia's emergence as a leader in global combat sports. With the reinvigoration of cult classic video games in tournaments and competitions in a world-first, stc group is bringing the future of entertainment to your screen.

From the roar of fans in a packed stadium to the click of a controller, the pulse of modern sport is now beating through screens and stadiums alike. As the stages spotlighting Esports and boxing converge, one thing is clear: stc group isn't just connecting audiences to the future of digital entertainment – it's shaping it.

OPENING SHOTS

In the heart of New York City under the lights of Times Square, Ryan Garcia and Rolando Romero faced off in what was supposed to be a showcase for Garcia, but it was Romero (right), an 8-to-1 underdog, who dropped his foe en route to a unanimous decision victory.

OPENING SHOTS

Undisputed junior featherweight champion Naoya Inoue (right) was shockingly put down by a left hand from the tough and dangerous Ramon Cardenas in the second round, but The Monster didn't disappoint in his first appearance in the U.S. in almost four years – he got up, wore Cardenas down and stopped him in the eighth round.

Mikael Ona

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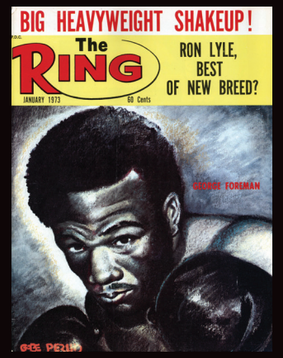

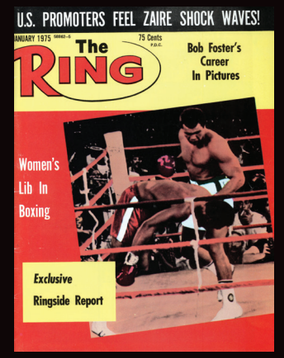

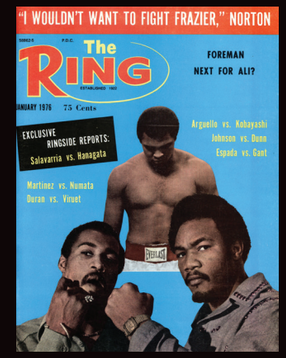

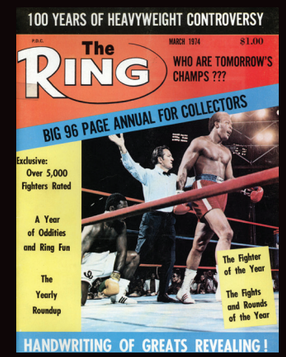

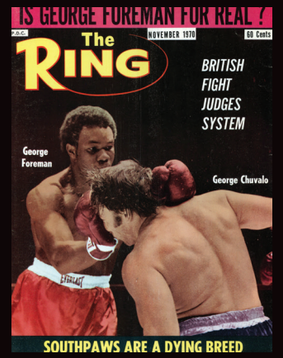

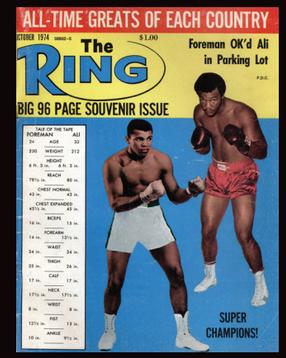

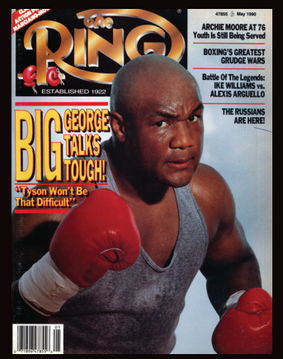

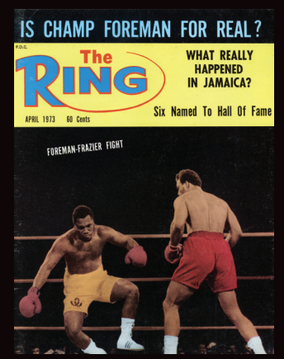

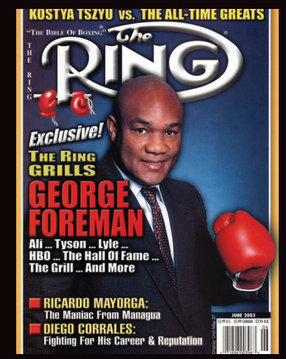

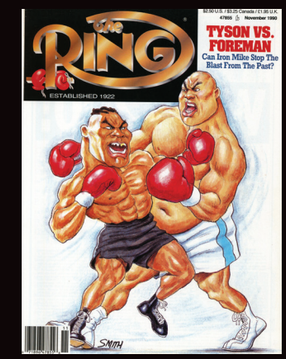

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June 2025

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Digital Orders Inquiries
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or P.O. Box 90254
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THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410) June 2025, is published 12 times per year by The Ring Magazine FZ, LLC P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Postmasters: Send change of address Notices to: The Ring Magazine Subscriber Service Dept., PO Box 16027, North Hollywood, CA 91615-6027, Phone: 818-286-3101; rngcs@magserv.com. Single copy price $9.99 in U.S.A. ,10.99 Canada (£10.99 in the U.K.). Global Subscription price $60.00 for 12 issues plus S&H. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2025 The Ring Magazine FZ-LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: advertising@ringmagazine.com. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540. UK distribution by Seymour Distribution Ltd., 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, England, EC1A 9PT. Printed In USA and the UK.

RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

HIGHS AND LOWS (AND HIGHS)

The Eubanks' ring walk ignited 65,000 fans and set the table for an unforgettable instant classic.

The mood in the boxing world was on an extreme high going into what promised to be a memorable Cinco De Mayo weekend, in part because of what took place in London the previous weekend.

April 26 belonged to Chris Eubank Jr. and Conor Benn, as well as the 65,000 enraptured fans who passionately cheered them on through 12 scintillating rounds at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

The prolonged celebration of their instant classic carried considerable momentum into the fight week buildup to three major cards headlined by three of the most popular boxers in the sport – Ryan Garcia on May 2, Canelo Alvarez on May 3 and Naoya Inoue on May 4.

However, most of that euphoric energy petered out during the unprecedented May 2 event that took place on the streets of Times Square. By the end of the May 3 show in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, boxing's mojo was all but declared dead.

Before I get into its resurrection and praise Inoue for dramatically rekindling the excitement with the help of unheralded but unrelenting challenger Ramon Cardenas on May 4, I must give props to the two offspring of legendary British rivals Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn.

Eubank Jr. and Benn settled their long-standing family feud in sensational fashion, both giving 100% in every round before absolutely emptying their tanks in an unforgettable final stanza. They rose to the occasion and exceeded expectations, producing early candidates for Fight, Round and Event of the Year.

The WWE-level promotional build-up to Eubank-Benn had it all in terms of storylines, chief among them the divide between Eubank Jr. and Sr., which had persisted for years. Their 11th-hour reunion was revealed to the Tottenham crowd and those watching the Sky Box Office and DAZN pay-per-view broadcasts just minutes before their ring walk together. The sight of the two entering the stadium to Tina Turner's "Simply the Best" – the theme song of Eubank Sr.'s storied career – evoked

overwhelming emotion from the British fans. (Even Yours Truly was a little choked up – and I'm an American Nigel Benn fan!)

But none of that would have mattered had the fight not delivered.

The pulse-pounding Round 12 of Eubank-Benn is among the top five final three minutes to a major main event that I've witnessed live. It's up there with Round 12 of Israel Vazquez-Rafael Marquez III, Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales I and III, and Morales-Manny Pacquiao I.

That's what fans will remember about this fight. Not the father-and-son storylines. Not the egg slap. Not the video game commercial. Not even Eubank winning by unanimous scores of 116-112.

Hotly contested fights that end like Eubank-Benn make lifelong boxing fans out of casuals and remind longtime observers why they love the sport.

That cold, breezy night in a packed, open-air soccer stadium is easily one of the most exhilarating events I've attended in more than 25 years of covering major boxing cards.

The following Friday in New York City was not.

There was tremendous hype and promotion going into the tripleheader topped by Garcia vs. Rolando Romero and supported by Devin Haney-Jose Ramirez and Teofimo Lopez-Arnold Barboza Jr. However, the co-mains – obviously intended to set up an anticipated rematch between Garcia and Haney – were absolute duds.

To his credit, Lopez showed up. The defending Ring/WBO 140-pound champ was not at his elite best, but he was focused and on form, which was more than enough to handcuff Barboza for 12 rounds. The previously unbeaten contender didn't have an answer for Lopez's athleticism and counterpunching style, and unfortunately for those watching the DAZN PPV, he was unwilling to force a fight.

The entertainment value of the show went from "mid" to dreadful with Haney-Ramirez, which looked like an interesting boxer-vs.-pressure fighter matchup on paper. However, Ramirez couldn't pull the trigger while the constantly moving and holding Haney refused to. The seemingly mentally shot fighter outpointed the physically shot fighter to earn a unanimous decision.

The Haney-Ramirez bout was the definition of "uneventful."

In the main event, Garcia, a 12-to-1 favorite according to oddsmakers, was upset by Romero. This could have been a compelling shocker had their styles played out as hoped. Both are explosive-but-flawed punchers. However, the only drama during the 12-round bout came in the second when Romero dropped Garcia with a hook. Nothing happened after that. Garcia was hesitant and uninterested until the final bell. Romero won rounds by merely boxing with purpose, walking the social media star down with a jab to the midsection. Rolly didn't step up the pressure or go for the knockout, but he won an unlikely unanimous decision.

The boxing world was not kind on social media.

Ring Magazine contributor and ratings panelist Adam Abramowitz: "Lot of fighters accepted losing tonight. Not one went out on his shield, or even tried to. So little urgency in these fights."

Ring Magazine contributor and proofreader David Greisman: "Teofimo Lopez landed just 127 punches tonight in 12 rounds (73 of them power shots).

"As bad as that may sound, the other two winning fighters – Devin Haney and Rolly Romero – landed 127 punches COMBINED (63 of them power shots)."

Greisman continued: "Devin Haney vs. Jose Ramirez is legit one of the worst fights I've ever seen. And there have been some terrible ones."

Hall of Famer and Ring Magazine columnist Al Bernstein: "I am loath to criticize boxers in this way, but tonight there was not a lot of urgency from any of the six fighters involved. Just kind of disappointing. And it is in stark contrast to the Eubank-Benn match – not that we expect every bout to be that exciting and well-contested."

We don't, but we do expect fighters – especially those making seven figures – to let their damn hands go.

Canelo Alvarez, who was making eight figures in his Riyadh Season debut on May 3, did not let his damn hands go. Neither did his opponent, William Scull, who saved most of his energy for his legs.

By the fourth round, I knew we were in for a monotonous 12 rounds. This is what I posted on X before Round 5:

"Ugh. I don't care for stick-and-

sela

SELA'S GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

REDEFINING FAN EXPERIENCES

Building upon its transformative impact in the Middle East and North Africa, Sela continues to orchestrate a powerful symphony of international expansion, solidifying its position as a global powerhouse in sports and entertainment. The recent launch of its London headquarters served as a crucial milestone and hub for cultivating opportunities across the globe.

A testament to Sela's global impact is its innovative and globally recognized sponsorship of Newcastle United Football Club, which remarkably earned the status of "The Most Award-Winning Football Sponsorship in the World in 2024" with more than 97 awards in a single year. This success highlights Sela's effective international partnerships and represents one aspect of its diverse global engagement, where redefining fan experiences are central to its approach.

Another testament to Sela's international approach lies in its deep involvement in the world of boxing. The groundbreaking multi-year partnership with The Ring and TKO signifies a substantial commitment to elevating fan experiences worldwide by providing a premier platform for established and emerging boxing talents, access to world-class training facilities and delivering top-tier boxing events.

Both of these projects align with Sela's overarching vision of creating spectacular and impactful entertainment experiences. The company's proven track record in delivering high-profile events, from the vibrant Riyadh and Jeddah Seasons, Esports World Cup, Formula E, Six Kings Slam to landmark boxing matches like Crawford vs. Madrimov and Joshua vs. Dubois, provides a strong foundation for its global boxing endeavors.

Sela's international strategy extends beyond single partnerships. It embodies a commitment to understanding diverse global audiences and tailoring experiences that resonate authentically. By forging strategic alliances, Sela is positioned to continue its trajectory as a leading force in the international sports and entertainment landscape. The global stage is now set for Sela to further amplify its impact and redefine global entertainment experiences.

movers who move more than they 'stick.' And I don't care for low-volume plodding pressure fighters. We don't need a 168-pound version of Haney-Ramirez."

But that's what we got. Another example of one boxer refusing to engage with the other being unable – or perhaps unwilling – to do anything about it. Only this time, the guy who stank it out was a lowly "B-side" and thus received no favors from the official judges, who handed in tallies of 115-113, 116-112 and 119-109 for the Mexican superstar.

Alvarez – who was content to stalk Scull, occasionally aiming right hands to the Cuban's body – regained the IBF strap. So, he will enter his September 12 superfight with Terence Crawford as the undisputed super middleweight champ but maybe not as the odds or media favorite.

Midway through the fight, I posted:

"OK, Canelo landed a few nice body shots in Round 6, but halfway through this fight I can see why Terence Crawford wants to fight him. If Canelo doesn't get upset tonight and the planned September showdown happens, I'm changing my pick to Bud. Canelo's in quicksand."

Once again, the "Boxing X" community was not happy:

Veteran scribe Dan Rafael: "Per @CompuBox: By throwing a combined 445 punches over 12 rounds, Canelo (152 punches) and Scull (293 punches) set a new record for fewest punches thrown in a 12-round [bout, according to] CompuBox's 40-year history of more than 15k bouts tracked. Old record: 459 (Parker-Wilder).

"Canelo's 152 thrown punches were the 2nd fewest in a 12-round fight in CompuBox's 40-year history and 15k+ fights tracked. And he still won easily against a track star."

Scull is partly to blame for the low-volume snooze fest, but elite fighters should know how to break down and eventually clip skittish stick-and-movers. (See Naoya Inoue's 11th-round TKO of Paul Butler for a recent example.)

At this point in his career, Canelo can only pull the trigger on one punch at a time vs. a runner.

Canelo seemed just as disgusted as the fans watching.

Added Abramowitz on X: "I don't think this was a good version of Canelo by any means, but this was embarrassing by Scull. Even if you believe that Scull was doing well in the fight, the way he fought those last two rounds was just embarrassing. I've seen so many truly awful performances this weekend.

"Thankfully, Bud is a complete fighter, an elite veteran who has too much pride and confidence to do anything resembling Haney or Scull… so we'll probably get a proper fight on Sept. 12 in Las Vegas, but there's no denying that Canelo looked flat in Riyadh."

And there's no denying that The Monster was absolutely electrifying on May 4 at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

Inoue and Cardenas – as well as Rafael Espinoza and Edward Vazquez in the co-feature to the ESPN broadcast – gave fans everything missing from the May 2 and 3 main events. They took risks. They took punches. They got hurt. They raged back.

Inoue was decked hard in Round 2, but the undisputed junior featherweight champ got up and resumed his seek-and-destroy mission against a dangerous and defiant Cardenas, who earned a legion of fans with his bold stand against the Japanese superstar. Inoue dropped Cardenas in Round 7 and forced referee Thomas Taylor to save the San Antonio native in the eighth.

Espinoza battered gutsy Vazquez to a seventh-round stoppage in defense of his WBO featherweight title. The 6-foot-1 Mexican threw 520 punches (landing 40%, according to CompuBox), more than the combined total punches thrown in each of the Haney-Ramirez, Garcia-Romero and Alvarez-Scull bouts.

"Boxing X" was unanimous in declaring that these co-mains "saved the weekend."

Ring Magazine columnist Steve Kim: "A text I got from Larry Merchant earlier: 'OMG, a real fight.'

"I got others from casual fans who were amazed by #InoueCardenas."

Kim had considered not attending the Top Rank show when Inoue's little-known opponent was announced, but he ultimately decided to go. A choice he's glad he made.

"You go to a fight, and you just never know what you might witness," Kim posted to X. "Tonight is one of those nights I won't forget. They are fewer and far between nowadays, and you appreciate them more at this point." RING

A BANNER YEAR IN THE MAKING

By Al Bernstein

Taylor-Serrano 3 headlines a spectacular card at MSG.

As we reach the halfway point of this year in boxing, it is apparent that 2025 has much more to give. The first six months have produced some good fights and exciting moments, but what awaits us might be even better. Yes, I know I'm known as a glass-half-full guy, but hear me out on this one before the boxing cynic in you takes over.

The criteria for a good year in the sport is fairly simple: 1. How many important matches are made, and 2. How many good fights overall are made on all levels. An objective look ahead tells us 2025 will very likely succeed in both categories.

The final six months of the year could not possibly get off to a better start, with stacked, back-to-back shows on July 11 and 12. On the 11th, Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano will pack Madison Square Garden for their third fight, with the undisputed junior welterweight championship on the line. On that four-fight card, there are three more matchups featuring Ring Magazine champs – Alycia Baumgardner, Ellie Scotney and Dina Thorslund – against three hard-charging challengers in Jennifer Miranda, Yamileth Mercado and Shuretta Metcalf. Every match on this card has the potential to be a good one.

The Taylor-Serrano match is special in every way. Two razor-thin and disputed decisions that went Taylor's way have left plenty of unfinished business between these two women, who make for the absolute perfect style matchup in the ring. Both previous fights were thrilling and well-fought. The buildup to this fight has already been spicier than the first two, so that will satiate fans who want drama to go along with great boxing action. These two could fight 10 times, and every time it would likely be an action-packed 10-rounder that went right down to the wire. This card promises to be a landmark event for women's boxing.

The following night, the next edition of the Ring fight series will provide four more potentially exciting matches. While some are debating which fight deserves to be the main event, no one is debating whether this is a good card. Master boxer Shakur Stevenson will defend his lightweight crown against body-punching whirlwind William Zepeda, and they will share the top of the card with two 168-pounders: Edgar Berlanga and Hamzah Sheeraz. Then there's an excellent 140-pound matchup with WBC titleholder Alberto Puello taking on the always exciting Subriel Matias in a fight that could well steal the night. Rounding out the televised card is David Morrell Jr., back in action after his classic fight in February with David Benavidez, taking on 175-pound knockout artist Imam Khataev.

Both cards have important fights, and both have depth in their undercards. Criteria met.

I can't hang my hat on one weekend if I am to claim the rest of this year could be special. So, consider all these

Andrew Matthews

fights that are on tap for this year.

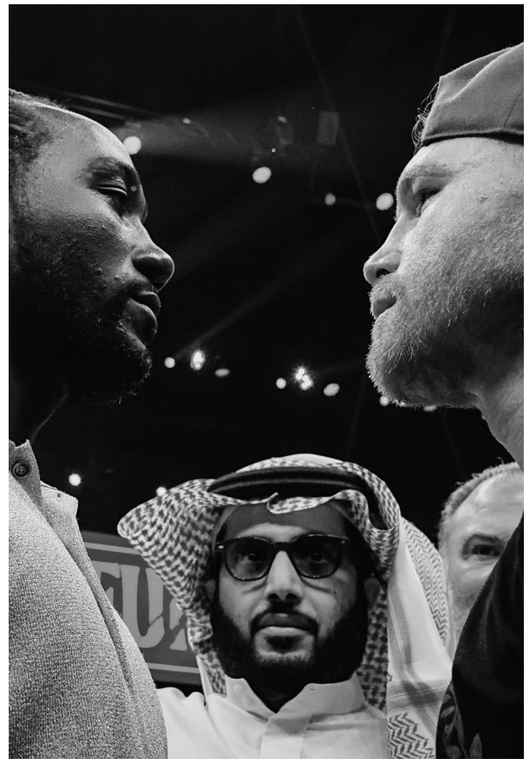
★**Dmitry Bivol vs. Artur Beterbiev.** Yes, some people wanted Bivol to face Benavidez next rather than completing this trilogy, but not one boxing fan doubts that this will be an excellent fight. These two men have carved out a special place for themselves in light heavyweight history.

★**Naoya Inoue vs. Murodjon Akhmadaliev.** This battle for 122-pound supremacy is the matchup that most fans have clamored for this past year or so. It will probably happen in September, and depending on the results of the fight, don't rule out Inoue getting back in the ring in December to add even more luster to 2025. That could be against the always fun to watch Nick Ball.

★**Oleksandr Usyk vs. Daniel Dubois.** This rematch, scheduled for July, has appeal because of the controversy in their first fight. Many feel that the body punch that dropped Usyk and delayed the fight for nearly four minutes was not a low blow, as it was ruled, and it should've been a fight-winning punch for Dubois. This fight has further allure simply because fans appreciate any chance to see the great Usyk in action before his amazing career ends.

The Usyk-Dubois rematch is threatening to become personal.

★**Gervonta Davis vs. Lamont Roach.** This rematch of their controversial draw has captured the imagination of fans for a variety of reasons. It is widely thought that Roach was robbed of a win by poor refereeing and scoring. Fans and pundits alike are wondering whether Roach is better than people thought or Davis just had an off night. The latter's large fan base is eager to see their hero redeem himself. For Roach, it is a chance to cement a position in the upper echelon of the sport.



Canelo vs. Crawford has all the elements of a superfight.

★**Mikaela Mayer vs. Lauren Price.** This battle for the undisputed welterweight championship is one of the most appealing matches in women's boxing. Both fighters pledged their desire to make it happen after their last bouts, in which Mayer defended her WBO title and Ring Magazine/WBA champion Price added the IBF and WBC belts to her collection. Both fighters looked spectacular in those outings, and this is as close to a 50-50 fight as you will ever see.

★**Canelo Alvarez vs. Terence Crawford.** In terms of marketability, this is the very definition of a megafight. There is debate about Crawford being able to climb so high in weight and be effective against Alvarez, but the Omaha great has never failed as a pro and he says he'll be more than a worthy opponent for boxing's biggest star. This match will garner coverage from all sports media and shine a light on the sport for casual boxing fans.

It would be hard for me to imagine that among these already scheduled and virtually certain to be scheduled fights, we don't get a classic or two – maybe more. All of this boxing action does not even take into account the many unannounced matches involving other stars and prospects for the rest of the year. I have maintained that boxing's product has been consistently good in recent years, whatever other issues the sport has faced. Now I will go one step further and suggest that the remainder will exceed the first half in terms of boxing excellence. Am I just a cockeyed optimist? Based on the evidence I see, I think I'm being a realist. If I'm wrong, quotes from this column will be plastered all over social media in December with clever memes to show what an imbecile I am. If I'm right, maybe one or two people will post something like this: "Great year in boxing. I think I remember a column in Ring Magazine that predicted this. That Doug Fischer guy really knows what he's talking about." RING

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MEDIOCREWEIGHT

By Steve Kim

The middleweight division is one of the most storied in boxing history. The likes of Harry Greb, Stanley Ketchel, Sugar Ray Robinson, Marvin Hagler and Bernard Hopkins are just some of the names in this lineage. It's one of the sport's original weight classes, before the juniors and supers arrived, and carries a certain mystique with it.

But where have you gone, William Joppy and Keith Holmes, much less Gennadiy Golovkin?

Right now, I don't think I have ever seen this division so devoid of marquee talent or notable names. Yeah, yeah, I know, I'm now the old guy on the beat, and perhaps I do occasionally go all Statler and Waldorf. But just look at the current Ring Magazine middleweight rankings:

1. **Zhanibek Alimkhanuly**
2. **Carlos Adames**
3. **Hamzah Sheeraz**
4. **Erislandy Lara**
5. **Chris Eubank Jr.**
6. **Etinosa Oliha**
7. **Kyrone Davis**
8. **Troy Isley**
9. **Shane Mosley Jr.**
10. **Denzel Bentley**

Alimkhanuly is the leader at 160 but lacks a big-name nemesis.

There's not a lot of glamor in what is traditionally one of the sport's glamor divisions. As you look at this lot of 160-pounders, you see some familiar names mixed in with relative unknowns. The Ring championship is currently vacant. And it's justified because, quite frankly, nobody has done anything worthy enough to earn it.

But if there is someone who might make a move, it's Alimkhanuly,

There's not a lot of glamor in what is traditionally one of the sport's glamor divisions.

who on April 5 made a successful homecoming to his native Kazakhstan by defending his IBF and WBO titles with a fifth-round stoppage of France's Anauel Ngamissengue. The 32-year-old Alimkhanuly (17-0, 12 KOs) is generally considered the world's best middleweight – but again, considering his colleagues, it's not exactly an earth-shattering distinction.

While he's a unified titleholder, keep in mind that after winning the WBO belt in May 2023, he then took the IBF strap from Vincenzo Gualtieri (TKO 6), who wasn't even rated in the top 10 by The Ring. His other middleweight title bouts have come against Denzel Bentley (UD 12), Steven Butler (KO 2) and Andrei Mikhailovich (TKO 9).

So yes, by virtue of his undefeated mark and his two title straps, perhaps Alimkhanuly should be considered the best middleweight. It's akin to being the fastest tortoise in a 100-meter dash, though.

But make no mistake: "Qazaq Style" is an all-around talented fighter. He has power in both hands, and utilizing his southpaw stance he has shown that he can box effectively when necessary. Versus the game Ngamissengue, Alimkhanuly exhibited the ability to counterpunch inside the pocket and set up his power shots. He'd almost certainly be favored against every other current middleweight. The fact is, though, no one has truly made their mark in this division.

The aforementioned Golovkin, like Alimkhanuly, is from Kazakhstan. But really that's where the similarities end. This is not a knock on the latter, but it should be noted that after "GGG" was first introduced to audiences in the United States, he was kept on a busy schedule – at least by today's standards – under the guidance of Tom Loeffler. The plan was simple and effective: In lieu of facing big names early on, they would work in volume, grow audiences on HBO and build Golovkin into a legitimate gate attraction in both Los Angeles and New York.

WBC titleholder Carlos Adames (right) attacks Hamzah Sheeraz.

Mark Robinson

Alimkhanuly has been relegated to the usual twice-a-year schedule that most modern-day titleholders employ while playing to relatively small crowds in obscure locations like Stockton, which visitstockton.org describes as "a flavorful Northern California getaway," and Rosenberg, Texas. Golovkin was a pillar of the HBO Boxing franchise, while Alimkhanuly is just a spoke in the Top Rank programming wheel on ESPN.

The reality is that he has never really been a priority for Top Rank. In fact, his bout with Mikhailovich was originally supposed to take place in Las Vegas but was temporarily scuttled when Alimkhanuly fainted the night before the weigh-in – the result of severe dehydration. The fight instead took place a few months later in Australia, meaning that his last two bouts have taken place outside the U.S. and were only streamed on ESPN+.

Golovkin chased Canelo Alvarez and eventually earned a few big paydays against him, but who is Alimkhanuly's red-headed whale? Currently, the other titleholders are Erislandy Lara (WBA) and Carlos Adames (WBC), who are represented by Premier Boxing Champions. In years past, facing them would have been difficult, if not downright impossible. But now it seems that Top Rank and PBC are willing to sit down and break bread. (Geez, I wonder what brought that about?)

Even then, would becoming the undisputed champion against this crop really mean that much? To be fair, getting this distinction in any era would be a landmark achievement for a prizefighter. But the reality is that wearing the division's crown probably still wouldn't make him a star. RING

Gregory Bojorquez

It is no exaggeration to say that Bernard Hopkins might be one of the greatest athletes who has ever lived. His dedication to boxing was bolstered by a physical fitness obsession and an early reappraisal of his dietary habits. By the time he was 40 years old, Hopkins had made a record 20 middleweight title defenses to secure his status as an all-time great. But he wasn't done. His monastic lifestyle extended Hopkins' youth far beyond that of a mere mortal and saw him win multiple belts at light heavyweight. He won his final world title fight at the age of 49, a record that is sure to stand the test of time. • However, like many great fighters, all of the glory that Hopkins attained was rooted in very humble beginnings.

My First Time

by Bernard Hopkins

As told to Tom Gray

THE FIRST TIME I LACED UP THE GLOVES

"I was 8 or 9 years old. My Uncle Arthur – we called him Arty for short – was a highly respected prospect who sparred many times with Marvelous Marvin Hagler. At the time, Hagler had come down to beat two of the greatest middleweights from Philadelphia, Willie 'The Worm' Monroe and Boogaloo Watts. I got my DNA from Arthur McCloud, who was my mother's brother.

"My Uncle Arty took me down to Joe Frazier's gym on Broad and Glenwood. I fell in love with boxing to the point that I was feared in the neighborhood from a young age. This was 1977, '78, '79, and there was an amateur program at the gym. They had the Golden Gloves, the AAU and the nationals. I remember that clearly, like it was yesterday. This amateur program produced world champions – the likes of [former IBF junior middleweight titleholder] Robert 'Bam Bam' Hines … I could name all of them. They were really respected because Joe Frazier had been the heavyweight champion of the world.

"This gym was like a dungeon with a very intimidating atmosphere. It was like a box with enough room for 15 to 20 people on one floor and a mirror on one wall from end to end. I wanted the attention of all the trainers in there, so I'd be shouting and screaming as I hit the bag. I was there watching pro fighters, people who were older than me, people who had been on TV. So you can imagine, I was saying to myself, 'I can be Joe Frazier. I can be Robert "Bam Bam" Hines. I can be [former IBF junior welterweight titleholder] Gary Hinton.' Just look at the track record of Philadelphia fighters."

MY FIRST AMATEUR FIGHT

"We still laugh about it today. My first amateur fight was against Robert 'Bam Bam' Hines, who had beaten Gary Hinton [as an amateur]. He was a southpaw, and he beat the living lights out of me. I told my trainer that I'd get him in the next round, and he said, 'The fight's over. They stopped it!' It was the second round of a three-round fight in the Pennsylvania Golden Gloves Championship [in 1977]. That's a big tournament because you're representing your state.

"I'll never forget it, because we knew each other. Robert's got to be a year or two older than me. I'm 60, and he's got to be 62 or something. (Note: Hines is 64.) I'm 60, and I still remember that butt-whipping. Robert Hines is the reason I became so good against southpaws. We sparred at Joe Frazier's gym and at Champ's Gym, which is another historic gym in Philadelphia.

"I learned how to handle southpaws through getting my lessons, my adolescence ass-whippings, from Robert Hines."

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL FIGHT

OCTOBER 11, 1988
OPPONENT: CLINTON MITCHELL
VENUE: RESORTS INTERNATIONAL, ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

"I was inexperienced, but I had a heart bigger than the city of Philadelphia. Mitchell had been a really good amateur, and I was the opponent that night. I just wanted to get my first professional fight under my belt. For the previous five years, I'd been getting copies of Ring Magazine sent to me in prison (Hopkins spent time inside for armed robbery), so I was just grateful to be fighting.

"I felt that I lost the fight (Hopkins dropped a four-round

Hopkins' victory over Robert Allen in 2004 set up the superfight that would produce The Executioner's most memorable punch.

MY PERFECT PUNCH

SEPTEMBER 18, 2004
OPPONENT: OSCAR DE LA HOYA

"My best shot to stop a guy is with Oscar De La Hoya. You cannot shake off a good body shot – you can ask any Hall of Famer or contender; you can ask anybody who did boxing for sport or for play. I was taught this in Philadelphia. That's why Joe Frazier was so vicious with the left hook from every angle. The left hook to the body was my favorite punch. We know the jab is the set-up punch: jab and left hook; left hook, then jab. You can do so much with the left hook.

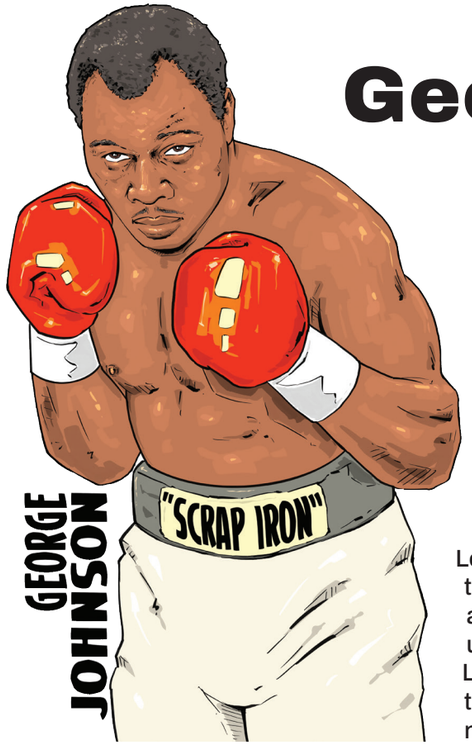
"I knew Oscar was wearing down, and we talk about it and laugh about it. I knew he was wearing down because every round, I was picking up the pace. If you watch from the sixth round on, that's when I start to put on the pressure. I started giving him feints with my head, like I was going to the body, but I didn't go, and I seen him react to it. He braced himself, figuring that it was coming, and once I got him conscious of that, I caught him later on as he threw a punch out of panic. I got closer to him. He knew it was coming, threw a punch out of desperation, and I connected as he was throwing. One of the best punches you can hit a guy with is catching him before he catches you. I got there first.

"Before the left hook, I gave him a throwaway jab as a distraction. It's like someone saying, 'Look over there, that's a nice car!' They turn away, and you steal their pocketbook. That's the New York hustle. If anyone ever says to you to look over there, don't look."

You can follow the great Bernard Hopkins on Instagram @bhopdaalien.

majority decision). I was in shape, but I wasn't in shape for real boxing. I got tired. There's a difference between boxing in prison and boxing in Atlantic City Resorts International. I did my best. Was I upset? Yes! Do you want to know how upset I was? I didn't fight again until 1990. Let's just say 1989 was rough and I should be in prison right now. I can't say much more, because my wife is looking at me. I was now out of the gym and I was crushed. I'd made $150 for my pro debut and lost.

"Mitchell had won Golden Gloves titles and he was decorated. I found that out after the fact, but if you look him up, he was highly regarded. His career was cut short when he was diagnosed with a disease (diabetes) and he passed away." RING



BY THE NUMBERS:

George “Scrap Iron” Johnson

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

He packed too many pounds on his 5-foot-9 frame, and he lost more often than he won. Yet “Scrap Iron” Johnson (1938-2016) was one of the most entertaining journeymen of his day. Known for his willingness to take punishment from the best heavyweights of his era, Johnson embodied the image of the game trial horse. With his upbeat personality, a less-than-athletic physique and a penchant for snazzy hats and footlong cigars, Johnson was a colorful character in the Los Angeles fight scene and a crowd-pleasing addition to any undercard. He’d earned the nickname of “Scrap” as a child in Oklahoma City, where he worked at his uncle’s body shop carrying car parts in a wheelbarrow. Later, teammates on his high school football team added the word “Iron.” Few fighters have been so worthy of a nickname. Here’s his story by the numbers.

28 losses »

The record speaks for itself: 22-28-4 (11 KOs). Fighters who are brought along carefully and protected by handlers do not put up such numbers. As far as a career strategy, Johnson’s camp simply threw him to the lions and then patched him up to fight another day. For much of his career, he was employed part-time as a “community aid” at Jefferson High School in L.A., the only way for this hard-luck heavyweight to make ends meet. Still, some of Johnson’s bouts were minor classics of their time, like the night he went 10 rounds with Eddie Machen in 1966. It was one of many nights where Johnson lost the fight but won the crowd. This was the theme of his career, and probably what earned Johnson his 2005 induction into the California Boxing Hall of Fame.

54 fights »

A reporter once asked Johnson how many fights he’d had. “I never bothered to keep track,” Johnson said. “I just take ’em one at a time. Makes no difference to me who I’m fighting.” It didn’t help that Johnson’s camp often fudged his record and shaved off five or six losses. They were also vague about his age and the number of years he’d been in the business. At one point, when he was 4-7, a promoter billed Johnson as 26-5, and the “champion of Oklahoma.” No wonder he wasn’t sure of his exact record.

1 draw with Scott LeDoux »

Even in the twilight of his career, Johnson was being hired to test young heavyweights. In August of ’75, he arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota, to fight Scott LeDoux, a 14-1 local prospect. Johnson entered the ring heavier than ever. “His long purple trunks stretched from above an ample stomach almost to his knees,” reported the Minneapolis Star. But Johnson could still put a scare into a young prospect. He staggered LeDoux more than once and finished stronger over the final three rounds. When the verdict was announced as a majority decision for LeDoux, the hometown crowd roared its disapproval. Local reporter Joe Hennessy took credit for examining the scorecards and noting an error. The three judges had turned in one card for LeDoux, one for Johnson, and one even. After Hennessy pointed this out, the verdict was immediately read again as a draw, though the 4,000 fans at the St. Paul Civic Center were still booing.

10 tough rounds with Joe Frazier »

Though he came out on the losing end, Johnson’s 10-round stand with Frazier at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles may have been his career highlight. On May 4, 1967, Johnson entered the ring against a young, prime time Frazier, who was 15-0 at the time. Though Frazier appeared to win each round, the 9,000 in attendance were clearly on Johnson’s side. Johnson electrified the crowd in the third when he trapped Frazier in a neutral corner and wobbled him. “Johnson lashed out with rights and lefts that snapped Frazier’s head back,” reported the Los Angeles Times.

Frazier came back and took control, but Johnson had given the customers a thrill. At the fight’s end, they showed their appreciation. “The fans were on their feet,” wrote the Times, “showering the ring with money and chanting ‘Scrap Iron, Scrap Iron’ while awaiting the verdict, but actually the issue was never really in doubt.” Frazier said of Johnson, “He’s got a good right hand. He’s a tough fighter.” Nights like this made journalists realize Johnson was more than just a human punching bag. What did Johnson think? “It was just another loss,” he said.

6 fight winning streak »

After Johnson went the full route with Frazier, it seemed his manager, Benny Conyers, decided to match him more carefully and build up his record. During the next several months Johnson produced a career-high six consecutive wins over opponents less formidable than Frazier, including Ray “Windmill” White (a light heavyweight), Roy “Cookie” Wallace and Alvin “Tiger” Carter, whose record was 3-13-1. Another of his victims was musclebound veteran Santo Amonti, who had once been the heavyweight champion of Italy. Johnson knocked Amonti out and into retirement, causing some journalists to wonder if Scrap Iron was the new Italian champion. “The Italians will love him,” wrote L.A. columnist Jim Murray. “They revere old ruins.”

Unfortunately, Johnson’s reward for this undefeated run was an opportunity to fight Sonny Liston in Nevada. Liston was past his prime, but he was better than Cookie Wallace. “Liston hit Johnson with more punches than ringsiders could count,” reported the Fresno Bee. Referee Harry Krause stepped in at 2:55 of the seventh, ending the fight and Johnson’s winning streak. A sidenote to the Liston fight is that Johnson was scheduled to get married at midnight after the bout. He postponed it a day so he could recover from the fight. Johnson later joked, “Liston hit me so hard, I married the wrong woman.”

1 impostor »

The nerve of some people. In 1964, a shameless character calling himself “George ‘Scrap Iron’ Johnson” (and claiming to be from Oklahoma City, no less) fought light heavyweight Andy Kendall in Portland, Oregon. The fake Johnson was KO’d at approximately 1:00 of Round 1, and if that wasn’t enough to prove he wasn’t the real Scrap Iron, his weight of 175 certainly was. The real Scrap was 40 pounds heavier and hadn’t seen 175 in many years.

3 fights with Jerry Quarry »

Quarry was a fiery young contender when he first met Johnson in 1966 at the Olympic Auditorium. A great left-hooker, Quarry scored a KO at 2:40 of Round 2, though Johnson always claimed the fight was stopped too quickly. Quarry went on to have several high-profile fights, while Johnson grew comfortable in his role as a gatekeeper. They met again at the Olympic in 1970. This time, Quarry won a unanimous decision, but he didn’t look good and the 5,500 fans jeered the verdict. Their third meeting took place in Honolulu in 1975 when both were past their best years. In a virtual repeat of their second bout, Quarry won the 10-round decision, only to be booed. “Scrap doesn’t go out easy,” Quarry said.

7 rounds with George Foreman »

George Foreman once told The Ring that Johnson had the best chin of anyone he’d fought. Indeed, Johnson’s durability was the stuff of legend. Not surprisingly, he took everything Foreman threw in their May 1970 bout. The referee stopped the contest in the seventh because Johnson was cut, but Foreman had not knocked Johnson down and never seriously hurt him. Later, Foreman hired Johnson as a sparring partner. Johnson also worked as Joe Frazier’s sparring partner in the mid-1970s, bouncing between the Frazier and Foreman camps. By then, Johnson was done as a fighter, but his ability to absorb punishment remained second to none. RING

Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of May 4, 2025 • By Brian Harty

Ed Mulholland

Eimantas Stanionis eventually folded under the pressure from Jaron Ennis.

POUND FOR POUND

Movement on the P4P list was more about demotions than promotions in the past month. Canelo Alvarez dropped a notch to No. 8 after his record-setting win over William Scull – that record being the lowest number of thrown punches (445) that CompuBox has ever counted in a 12-round fight, and Canelo only accounted for about a third of them. He is once again the undisputed super middleweight champion after reclaiming the IBF title, and the hope now is that Terence Crawford will force a less cautious version of the Mexican superstar to show up in September.

Devin Haney (No. 9 last month) and Jose Ramirez also seemed reluctant to risk much in a fight that saw just over 500 punches thrown. Haney cruised safely to a unanimous decision win, but the performance didn't really scream "best in the world," so he was dropped from the list and David Benavidez returned at No. 10.

HEAVYWEIGHT

In late February, Martin Bakole sacrificed himself to save the day by swooping in from his home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be a last-hour replacement against Joseph Parker. On May 3, he was back in the ring, and it's unfortunate that he didn't spend more of those two-plus months cutting weight, because a bit more mobility might've helped against Efe Ajagba, who used his much quicker feet and long reach to box from a safe distance in their 10-rounder on the Canelo-Scull undercard. Bakole lumbered forward in pursuit of a fight, and occasionally a brief one broke out, but the bout never really found a storyline and was scored a majority draw. Accordingly, Ajagba was lifted from No. 10 to No. 9 so he could sit beside No. 8-rated Bakole on the list.

CRUISERWEIGHT

On the tail of losing his WBO title in a brave but futile stand against Gilberto Ramirez last November, Chris Billam-Smith (No. 2) jumped back into the trench for 12 rounds of fierce hand-to-hand combat with Brandon Glanton (No. 8 at the time) on the undercard of Chris Eubank Jr. vs. Conor Benn in London. This time it was Glanton who was tough but unsuccessful, however. Billam-Smith held off the American's charges long enough for exhaustion to set in, then capitalized with cleaner punching down the stretch. Clearly itching for another title shot, "The Gentleman" held his position below No. 1-rated Ramirez while Glanton dropped to No. 10.

After 26½ months out of the ring and somehow still the WBC titleholder, Badou Jack finally returned and defended his belt with a majority decision over Noel Mikaelian, who himself had been inactive for 18 months but was somehow *not* the WBC titleholder (it's complicated). But considering the amount of downtime, it was a decent scrap. Jack reentered the list at No. 6, Mikaelian settled in just below him at No. 7, and two men had to make way for their arrivals: One was Glanton, and the other was No. 4-rated Richard Riakporhe, who tested the water at heavyweight on the same card and scored a fourth-round stoppage of journeyman Kevin Nicolas Espindola.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT

Back in December, Jaime Munguia tried his traditional steamroll approach against Bruno Surace and ended up on the starched side of a one-punch Upset of the Year. In the May 3 rematch, Munguia introduced just enough discipline to box smartly and avoid another disaster as he wore Surace down with a steady regimen of body shots, and the result was a wide unanimous decision and a promotion from No. 8 to No. 5 in the Mexican's favor. Surace slipped from No. 7 to No. 8 while the loser of the main event, Scull, was pushed down to No. 6 from No. 5.

MIDDLEWEIGHT

Eubank Jr.-Benn was, thankfully, a heavily hyped-up fight that delivered a hell of a good time for the 65,000 fans who packed Tottenham Hotspur Stadium to witness the hereditary grudge match, but it resulted in no movement in the ratings. Eubank stayed put at No. 5 and Benn remained outside the list.

In one of the support bouts, 25-year-old Irishman Chris McKenna notched the biggest win of his career thus far with a wide unanimous decision over former 154-pound titleholder Liam Smith, 36, who one panelist said "looked like a shell of his former self." McKenna replaced Denzel Bentley at No. 10.

WELTERWEIGHT

Jaron "Boots" Ennis vs. Eimantas Stanionis was another chance to see a developing star in action and another opportunity to trot out some corny riffs on Ennis' nickname: Stanionis went to boot camp and got stomped; he asked for a promotion and got the boot instead, he made like a hard drive and got booted up, the boots licked him. Or simply: Boots kicked his ass. Aside from landing a good shot here and there, any pre-fight promises the Lithuanian made about applying relentless pressure were stifled once Ennis settled into his comfort zone. From there, the Philadelphian was so fluid with his stance, defense and punch choice that it was difficult to pin his style down – sometimes he looked like a Mayweather wannabe and others he just seemed to be making it all up in the rhythm of the moment, Drunken Master-style. That relaxation still led to lapses that resulted in punches received – good for entertainment value – but Stanionis didn't have the power to capitalize on those sporadic hits.

Regardless, Ennis clearly approached this assignment with something to prove after his previous fight, a more lackadaisical UD victory over Karen Chukhadzhian, and tore into his opponent with unapologetic gusto. He capped it off with four rapid-fire uppercuts to score a knockdown at the end of the sixth round, after which Stanionis' corner surrendered. With the WBA/IBF unification fight also being a Ring No. 1 vs. No. 2 contest, Boots traded in his number for the vacant championship and everyone else moved up a notch, except Stanionis, who remained at No. 2 while Brian Norman Jr. (No. 3 last month) jumped into the No. 1 slot. At the bottom, Chukhadzhian reentered the list at No. 10. And it should be said that Ennis' win did earn a few votes for him to enter the pound-for-pound list, but the panel still leaned more toward bringing Benavidez back into the fold.

Rohan Polanco rose from No. 9 to No. 7 after a punishing shutout decision over unrated Fabian Maidana, who went down from a body shot in the final round but showed toughness worthy of the family name (his older brother is former welterweight titleholder Marcos Maidana) in making it to the final bell.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT

Dalton Smith entered the ratings at No. 10, partially on the merit of a 12-round blowout of Mathieu Germain in Sheffield, Smith's hometown, and also because the existing No. 10, former division champion Josh Taylor, was looking at an impending matchup with Ekow Essuman at welterweight.

Haney (No. 1) also went north for his fight with Ramirez, so his removal made room for undefeated (24-0, 19 KOs) southpaw Andy Hiraoka at No. 10. The movement at the top of the list plus a drop for losing a unanimous decision to division champ Teofimo Lopez left Arnold Barboza (No. 3 last month) sitting at No. 4.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT

In his second fight at 130 pounds, Raymond Ford pitched a 10-round shutout against Thomas Mattice and entered at No. 10, replacing Albert Bell, who seems like he's been stuck in a revolving door at the bottom of the list for ages.

FEATHERWEIGHT

You'd think that with a six-inch height advantage, Rafael Espinoza would've been landing a lot of punches on the top of Edward Vazquez's head, but the lanky WBO titleholder used an astonishing number of uppercuts and body shots – even crouching to do the latter – in pushing his opponent toward a seventh-

round stoppage. It's about as good a place for the word "dominant" as you'll find on this page – enough to lift Espinoza from No. 2 to No. 1 on the list. Undefeated New Yorker Bruce Carrington (No. 7) has been mentioned as a possible next opponent for the surging Mexican, who was making his third defense, and there's also a chance of Espinoza challenging Emanuel Navarette at 130 pounds.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT

Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (No. 9 last month) dropped out of the ratings after losing an eight-round unanimous decision to Kaito Yamasaki at junior featherweight. His exit put an end to an epic top-10 run that stretched all the way back to May 2013, when Sor Rungvisai (aka Wisaksil Wangek) stopped Yota Sato for the WBC title. After that, the trash collector-turned-knockout artist became the Cinderella story of the decade (at least) when he defeated Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez, who was 46-0 and the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter in the world at the time, by majority decision, then silenced all talk of poor judging with a devastating fourth-round knockout of Gonzalez in the immediate rematch. And the fairytale continued in Sor Rungvisai's next fight, when he won a majority decision over Juan Francisco Estrada in 2018 to become the first Ring champion at 115 pounds (it was an unusual case of No. 2 vs. No. 3 deciding the championship, because the fighter at No. 1 – a young lad named Naoya Inoue – was already committed to moving up in weight). Estrada relieved him of that championship when they met again, and the Thai fighter's peak had clearly come and gone, but Sor Rungvisai did his own version of shaking up the world with that trio of victories. After his removal, a spot opened up at No. 10 for South African Ricardo Malajika.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1. **OLEKSANDR USYK** – Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE** – Japan • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** – U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
4. **DMITRY BIVOL** – Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
5. **ARTUR BETERBIEV** – Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
6. **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** – U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
7. **JUNTO NAKATANI** – Japan • 30-0-0 (23 KOs)
8. **CANELO ALVAREZ** – Mexico • 63-2-2 (39 KOs)
9. **KENSHIRO TERAJI** – Japan • 25-1-0 (16 KOs
10. **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** – U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHT: Emmanuel Rodriguez (No. 6) was last seen fighting in May 2024, so he was dropped from the list and undefeated Filipino Kenneth "The Lover Boy" Llover swept in at No. 10.

STRAWWEIGHT: Double Olympic gold medalist Hasanboy Dusmatov (No. 5 last month) has kept one foot in the amateurs and has only managed to have six pro fights in six years, his most recent one being in November 2023, so he was also removed for inactivity. That cleared the way for Ryusei Matsumodo (5-0, 3 KOs), another case of a Japanese fighter who has been fast-tracked toward a title shot, to enter at No. 10.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** IBF, WBO – Kazakhstan • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 2 **CARLOS ADAMES** WBC – Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
- 3 **HAMZAH SHEERAZ** – U.K. • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 4 **ERISLANDY LARA** WBA – Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
- 5 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** – U.K. • 35-3-0 (25 KOs)
- 6 **ETINOSA OLIHA** – Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **KYRONE DAVIS** – U.S. • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)
- 8 **TROY ISLEY** – U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 9 **SHANE MOSLEY JR.** – U.S. • 22-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **AARON MCKENNA** – Ireland • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBA – U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
- 2 **VERGIL ORTIZ** – U.S. • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **ISRAIL MADRIMOV** – Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
- 4 **BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** IBF – Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 5 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** WBC, WBO – U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- 6 **SERHII BOHACHUK** – Ukraine • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)
- 7 **TIM TSZYU** – Australia • 25-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 8 **JESUS RAMOS** – U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 9 **JORGE GARCIA PEREZ** – Mexico • 33-4-0 (26 KOs)
- 10 **XANDER ZAYAS** – Puerto Rico • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C **JARON ENNIS** RING, IBF, WBA – U.S. • 34-0-0 (30 KOs)
- 1 **BRIAN NORMAN JR.** WBO – U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **EIMANTAS STANIONIS** – Lithuania • 15-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 3 **MARIO BARRIOS** WBC – U.S. • 29-2-1 (18 KOs)
- 4 **GIOVANI SANTILLAN** – U.S. • 33-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 5 **SHAKHRAM GIYASOV** – Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 6 **JIN SASAKI** – Japan • 19-1-1 (17 KOs)
- 7 **ROHAN POLANCO** – Dom. Rep. • 16-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 8 **ALEXIS ROCHA** – U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 9 **RAUL CURIEL** – Mexico • 15-0-1 (13 KOs)
- 10 **KAREN CHUKHADZHIAN** – Ukraine • 24-3-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBO – U.S. • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 1 **RICHARDSON HITCHINS** IBF – U.S. • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 2 **ALBERTO PUELLO** WBC – Dom. Rep. • 24-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 3 **JACK CATTERALL** – U.K. • 30-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 4 **ARNOLD BARBOZA** – U.S. • 32-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 5 **LIAM PARO** – Australia • 25-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 6 **SUBRIEL MATIAS** – Puerto Rico • 22-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL** WBA – U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
- 8 **SANDOR MARTIN** – Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
- 9 **DALTON SMITH** – U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **ANDY HIRAOKA** – Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **OLEKSANDR USYK** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO – Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 1 **TYSON FURY** – U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 2 **DANIEL DUBOIS** IBF – U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **JOSEPH PARKER** – New Zealand • 36-3-0 (24 KOs)
- 4 **AGIT KABAYEL** – Germany • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 5 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** – U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
- 6 **FILIP HRGOVIC** – Croatia • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 7 **ZHILEI ZHANG** – China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
- 8 **MARTIN BAKOLE** – Congo • 21-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 9 **EFE AJAGBA** – Nigeria • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- 10 **FABIO WARDLEY** – U.K. • 18-0-1 (17 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF – Australia • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 1 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** WBA, WBO – Mexico • 47-1-0 (30 KOs)
- 2 **CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** – U.K. • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 3 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** – Russia • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
- 4 **MICHAL CIESLAK** – Poland • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 5 **RYAN ROZICKI** – Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
- 6 **BADOU JACK** WBC – Sweden • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)
- 7 **NOEL MIKAELIAN** – Armenia • 27-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **YAMIL PERALTA** – Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
- 9 **LEONARDO MOSQUEA** – France • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR** – Sweden • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **DMITRY BIVOL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO – Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** – Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 2 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** WBC – U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
- 3 **CALLUM SMITH** – U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY YARDE** – U.K. • 27-3-0 (24 KOs)
- 5 **JOSHUA BUATSI** – U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **ALBERT RAMIREZ** – Venezuela • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 7 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** – Ukraine • 21-2-0 (17 KOs)
- 8 **DAVID MORRELL** – Cuba • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 9 **WILLY HUTCHINSON** – U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **IMAM KHATAEV** – Australia • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO – Mexico • 63-2-2 (39 KOs)
- 1 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** – France • 28-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **DIEGO PACHECO** – U.S. • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 3 **OSLEYS IGLESIAS** – Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 4 **CALEB PLANT** – U.S. • 23-2-0 (14 KOs)
- 5 **JAIME MUNGUIA** – Mexico • 45-2-0 (35 KOs)
- 6 **WILLIAM SCULL** – Cuba • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **VLADIMIR SHISHKIN** – Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 8 **BRUNO SURACE** – France • 26-1-2 (5 KOs)
- 9 **EDGAR BERLANGA** – U.S. • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 10 **LESTER MARTINEZ** – Guatemala • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

BILLAM-SMITH: Mark Robinson; Yarde: Richard Pelham

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA – U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)
- 2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** IBF – Ukraine • 18-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **KEYSHAWN DAVIS** WBO – U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 4 **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBC – U.S. • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 5 **WILLIAM ZEPEDA** – Mexico • 33-0-0 (27 KOs)
- 6 **RAYMOND MURATALLA** – U.S. • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 7 **ANDY CRUZ** – Cuba • 5-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 8 **FRANK MARTIN** – U.S. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **DENYS BERINCHYK** – Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **TEVIN FARMER** – U.S. • 33-8-1 (8 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO – Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
- 2 **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** WBC – U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **ANTHONY CACACE** IBF – Ireland • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 4 **LAMONT ROACH** WBA – U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)
- 5 **JOE CORDINA** – U.K. • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 6 **ROBSON CONCEICAO** – Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
- 7 **EDUARDO NUNEZ** – Mexico • 27-1-0 (27 KOs)
- 8 **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** – Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- 9 **ALBERT BATYRGAZIEV** – Russia • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 10 **RAYMOND FORD** – U.S. • 17-1-1 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **RAFAEL ESPINOZA** WBO – Mexico • 27-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **ANGELO LEO** IBF – U.S. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **NICK BALL** WBA – U.K. • 22-0-1 (12 KOs)
- 4 **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC – U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ** – Mexico • 31-3-0 (18 KOs)
- 6 **BRANDON FIGUEROA** – U.S. • 25-2-1 (19 KOs)
- 7 **BRUCE CARRINGTON** – U.S. • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 8 **MIRCO CUELLO** – Argentina • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **ROBEISY RAMIREZ** – Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **OMAR TRINIDAD** – U.S. • 18-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO – Japan • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)
- 1 **MARLON TAPALES** – Philippines • 40-4-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** – Uzbekistan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 3 **LUIS NERY** – Mexico • 36-2-0 (28 KOs)
- 4 **SAM GOODMAN** – Australia • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **ALAN PICASSO** – Mexico • 31-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 6 **SHABAZ MASOUD** – U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
- 7 **TJ DOHENY** – Ireland • 26-6-0 (20 KOs)
- 8 **ELIJAH PIERCE** – U.S. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **RAMON CARDENAS** – U.S. • 26-2-0 (14 KOs)
- 10 **SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ** – Mexico • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)

RING RATINGS ANALYSIS Through fights of May 4, 2025

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 JUNTO NAKATANI WBC
Japan • 30-0-0 (23 KOs)
2 RYOSUKE NISHIDA IBF
Japan • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 SEIYA TSUTSUMI WBA
Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)
4 YOSHIKI TAKEI WBO
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
6 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-2 (19 KOs)
7 TENSHIN NASUKAWA
Japan • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
8 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)
9 JEYVIER CINTRON
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)
10 KENNETH LLOVER
Philippines • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JESSE RODRIGUEZ RING, WBC
U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ WBA
Argentina • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 44-4-0 (28 KOs)
3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-3-1 (16 KOs)
4 PHUMELELE CAFU WBO
South Africa • 11-0-3 (8 KOs)
5 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)
6 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 43-5-1 (28 KOs)
7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)
8 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
9 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 42-5-1 (22 KOs)
10 RICARDO MALAJIKA
S. Africa • 15-2-0 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 KENSHIRO TERAJI WBA, WBC
Japan • 25-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 SEIGO YURI AKUI
Japan • 21-3-1 (11 KOs)
3 MASAMICHI YABUKI IBF
Japan • 18-4-0 (17 KOs)
4 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 RICARDO SANDOVAL
U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
6 ANGEL AYALA
Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)
7 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
8 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA WBO
U.S. • 9-1-0 (6 KOs)
9 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 39-6-1 (27 KOs)
10 TOBIAS REYES
Argentina • 16-1-1 (15 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 RENE SANTIAGO WBO
Puerto Rico • 14-4-0 (9 KOs)
2 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
3 SHOKICHI IWATA
Japan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
4 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 27-3-1 (19 KOs)
5 ADRIAN CURIEL
Mexico • 25-6-1 (5 KOs)
6 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 38-1-0 (34 KOs)
7 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 25-2-0 (20 KOs)
8 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
9 ERICK ROSA WBA
Dom. Rep. • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)
10 PANYA PRADABSRI
Thailand • 44-2-0 (27 KOs)

Benn-Eubanks: Mark Robinson; Ennis: Matthew Heasley

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C OSCAR COLLAZO RING, WBA, WBO
U.S. • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 MELVIN JERUSALEM WBC
Philippines • 24-3-0 (12 KOs)
2 PEDRO TADURAN IBF
Philippines • 17-4-1 (13 KOs)
3 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 26-1-0 (10 KOs)
4 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 YUDAI SHIGEOKA
Japan • 9-2-0 (5 KOs)
6 DIANXING ZHU
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)
7 SIYAKHOLWA KUSE
S. Africa • 8-2-1 (4 KOs)
8 YUNI TAKADA
Japan • 16-8-3 (6 KOs)
9 JOEY CANOY
Philippines • 24-5-2 (15 KOs)
10 RYUSEI MATSUMOTO
Japan • 5-0-0 (3 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Women's Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of May 4, 2025 • By Diego Morilla

Cris Esquepda/Golden Boy

POUND-FOR-POUND

Gabriela Fundora is unanimously expected to occupy a place on the pound-for-pound list for years to come, perhaps at No. 1 someday. But for now, she is still awaiting wider recognition, even after one of the most demolishing performances of her career.

After laying down a progressive beating and ultimately knocking out top contender Marilyn Badillo in the seventh round, Fundora had no place to go in the 112-pound division, where she reigns as undisputed champion and is almost unchallenged in an elite weight class currently populated by legends and young talents alike. However, a proposal was submitted on the ratings panel to elevate Fundora in the mythical pound-for-pound list.

The general opinion across the board was the same: She'll eventually get there, but now's not the time. In order to jump from her current No. 6 position, Fundora would have had to move past No. 5-rated Dina Thorslund, our inaugural champion in the bantamweight division. Most panelists feel that Fundora is a shoo-in top-three talent, but they need to see

Incredibly, Gabriela Fundora's career is still on the rise.

Marilyn Badillo succumbed to Fundora's attacks in Round 7.

proof of that before signing the ballot. Hence, no cake for Fundora just yet, although there is definitely plenty of sweetness awaiting her as she moves on with her extraordinary career.

MIDDLEWEIGHT

The 160-pound division, historically an elite weight class in male boxing, is one of the most desolate in the women's realm, boasting only a handful of top-class fighters around the world. It was only a few weeks ago that Australia's Chloe Chaos crashed the division at No. 5, but after losing to No. 1 contender Desley Robinson, Chaos found herself being replaced by fellow Aussie Kaye Scott, whose only claim to fame is a win over Robinson from last year (which Robinson avenged in December).

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT

Another thin division without a dominant fighter in sight, the 154-pound weight class has had very little movement recently. Canada's Mary Spencer scored a solid win over formerly rated Venezuelan contender Ogleidis Suarez, but it was just enough to keep the 40-year-old Spencer at her current No. 4. In the meantime, Florida's Elia Carranza is stuck in 6-10 territory until she can manage to notch a convincing victory against better opposition. Her win over Natasha Spence in late April did not count as such.

FLYWEIGHT

Another Ring championship defense and another brutal demolition job by Fundora, and against a Top 5 opponent to boot in Mexico's Badillo. There are a lot of great things to be said about Fundora, but she's saying them convincingly enough with her fists. Badillo would have been competitive against almost anyone else in the division, but Fundora simply annihilated her. All of that translates into a slight demotion for Badillo in favor of Russia's Jasmina Zapotoczna, who moves to No. 4 as Badillo slips to the bottom of the Top 5.

STRAWWEIGHT

WBO titlist Sarah Bormann (rated No. 2 last month) once again did what she does best: score wins at home in Germany against respectable opposition. But her split decision victory over Spain's Isabel Rivero was not enough for the panel to validate a move past pound-for-pound talent Yokasta Valle. Instead, Bormann gets to keep her seat warm until she finally comes out of the cocoon and faces Valle in a Ring championship match that could ignite this dormant but potentially very interesting division.

ATOMWEIGHT

Former WBC titleholder Fabiana Bytyqi (No. 4 last month) was finally removed from the 102-pound division after making another jump upward to to score a victory at bantamweight – this after winning a fight at 115 pounds. We're not sure where she will land, but a return to 102 seems highly unlikely. In a very thin field in boxing's lightest division, one name stood out due to her 11-0 record and her terrific upside, and that was Mexico's Camila Zamorano. The teenager (she's only 17) was thus rated at No. 5 as Nao Ugawa moved up to fill the vacancy left behind by Bytyqi.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	CLARESSA SHIELDS	U.S. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
2	KATIE TAYLOR	Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
3	CHANTELLE CAMERON	U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	AMANDA SERRANO	Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
5	DINA THORSLUND	Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	GABRIELA FUNDORA	U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
7	LAUREN PRICE	U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
8	YOKASTA VALLE	Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
9	MIKAELA MAYER	U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
10	TINA RUPPRECHT	Germany 15-1-1 (3 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C SAVANNAH MARSHALL RING,IBF — U.K. • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 1 FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN WBA,WBC — U.S. • 9-2-0 (2 KOs)
- 2 SHADASIA GREEN WBO — U.S. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 LANI DANIELS — New Zealand • 11-2-2 (1 KO)
- 4 MARY CASAMASSA — U.S. • 6-0-0 (1 KO)
- 5 CITLALLI ORTIZ — Mexico • 4-1-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C CLARESSA SHIELDS RING — U.S. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 1 DESLEY ROBINSON IBF, WBO — Australia • 10-3-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 MELINDA WATPOOL — Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
- 3 MAPULE NGUBANE — S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
- 4 ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO — Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
- 5 KAYE SCOTT — Australia • 4-1-0 (0 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C. (VACANT)
- 1 OSHAE JONES IBF — U.S. • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 CECILIA BRAEKHUS — Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
- 3 FEMKE HERMANS — Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
- 4 MARY SPENCER WBA — Canada • 10-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 5 PRISCILLA PETERLE — France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C LAUREN PRICE RING,IBF,WBA,WBC — U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
- 1 MIKAELA MAYER WBO — U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
- 2 NATASHA JONAS — U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
- 3 SANDY RYAN — U.K. • 7-3-1 (3 KOs)
- 4 MICHAELA KOTASKOVA — Czech Rep. • 10-0-2 (4 KOs)
- 5 STEPHANIE AQUINO — Puerto Rico • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C KATIE TAYLOR RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
- 1 CHANTELLE CAMERON — U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 2 SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON — U.S. • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 FLORA PILI — France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 4 ELIZABETH OSHOBA — Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 5 ELHEM MEKHALED — France • 17-3-0 (3 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C. (VACANT)
- 1 CAROLINE DUBOIS WBC — U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
- 2 BEATRIZ FERREIRA IBF — Brazil • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 3 TERRI HARPER WBO — U.K. • 15-2-2 (6 KOs)
- 4 RHIANNON DIXON — U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
- 5 BO MI RE SHIN — South Korea • 18-3-3 (10 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 1 DELFINE PERSOON — Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 2 LEILA BEAUDOIN — Canada • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 JENNIFER MIRANDA — Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- 4 MEA MOTU — New Zealand • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 RIMA AYADI — France • 11-0-0 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C AMANDA SERRANO RING,WBA,WBO — Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
- 1 TIARA BROWN WBC — U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOS)
- 2 SKYE NICOLSON — Australia • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 NINA MEINKE IBF — German • 19-3-0 (4 KOs)
- 4 SARAH MAHFOUD — Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 5 DANIELA BERMUDEZ — Argentina • 32-5-3 (12 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C ELLIE SCOTNEY RING,IBF,WBO — U.K. • 10-0-0 (0 KOs)
- 1 YAMILETH MERCADO WBC — Mexico • 24-3-0 (5 KOs)
- 2 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE — France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 NAZARENA ROMERO WBA — Argentina • 14-0-2 (8 KOs)
- 4 ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ — Mexico • 17-2-1 (3 KOs)
- 5 MIKIAH KREPS — U.S. • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- C DINA THORSLUND RING,WBC,WBO — Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 1 CHERNEKA JOHNSON WBA — Australia • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)
- 2 YULIAHN LUNA AVILA — Mexico • 28-4-1 (4 KOs)
- 3 SHURRETTA METCALF IBF — U.S. • 14-4-1 (2 KOs)
- 4 DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ — Mexico • 34-4-1 (5 KOs)
- 5 NINA HUGHES — U.K. • 6-2-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 MIZUKI HIRUTA WBO — Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 2 CARLA MERINO — Argentina • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
- 3 GINNY FUCHS — U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
- 4 ADELAIDA RUIZ — U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
- 5 ASLEY GONZALEZ WBC — Mexico • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- C GABRIELA FUNDORA RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 1 GABRIELA ALANIZ — Argentina • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 2 KENIA ENRIQUEZ — Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 ARELY MUCINO — Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
- 4 JAZMINA ZAPOTOCZNA — U.K. • 9-1-0 (0 KOs)
- 5 MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA — Mexico • 19-1-1 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 EVELIN BERMUDEZ IBF,WBO — Argentina • 21-1-1 (7 KOs)
- 2 KIM CLAVEL — Canada • 21-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 3 LOURDES JUAREZ — Mexico • 38-4-0 (5 KOs)
- 4 SARA BAILEY WBA — Canada • 6-0 (0 KOs)
- 5 GABRIELA ALANIZ — Argentina • 16-2-0 (6 KOS)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 YOKASTA VALLE WBC — Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
- 2 SARAH BORMANN WBO — Germany • 20-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 YUKO KUROKI WBA — Japan • 24-8-2 (10 KOs)
- 4 SOL CUDOS IBF — Argentina • 10-0-2 (3 KOs)
- 5 SOL BAUMSTARH — Argentina • 12-7-1 (8 KOs)

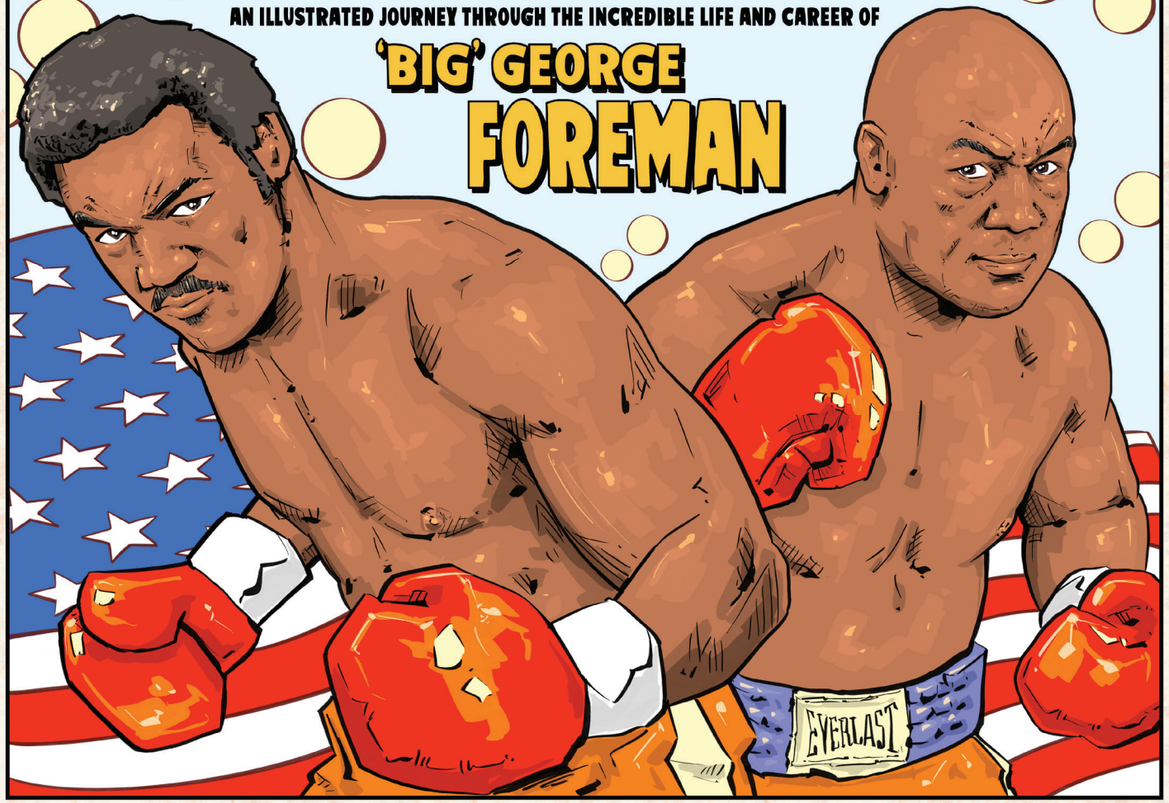
ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

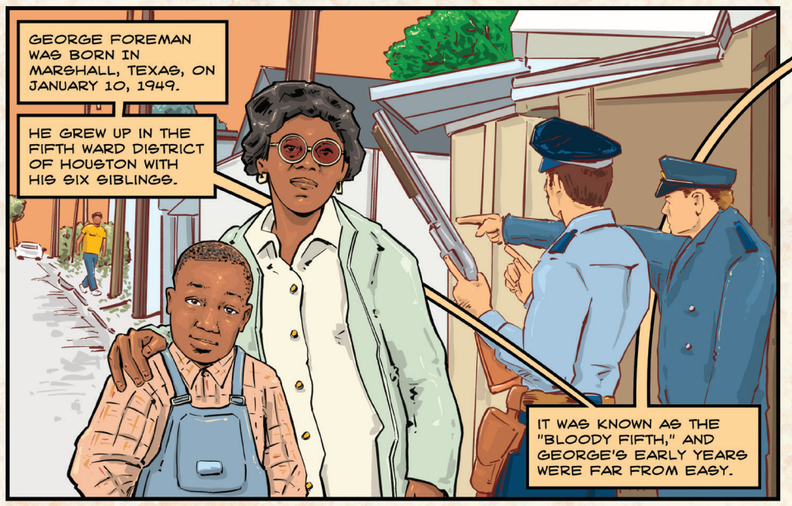
- C TINA RUPPRECHT RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)
- 1 SUMIRE YAMANAKA — Japan • 8-1-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 ERI MATSUDA — Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
- 3 ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS — Mexico • 9-0-1 (0 KOs)
- 4 NAO UGAWA — Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)
- 5 CAMILA ZAMORANO — 11-0-0 (1 KO)

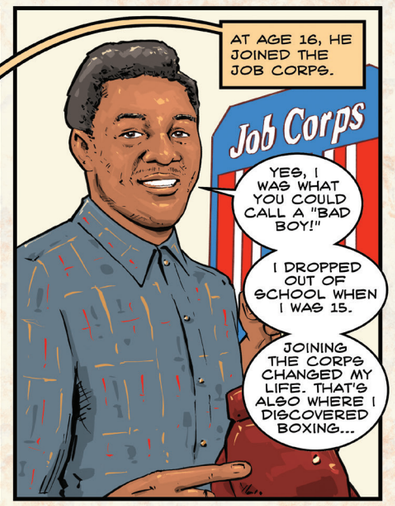
LEGENDS NEVER DIE

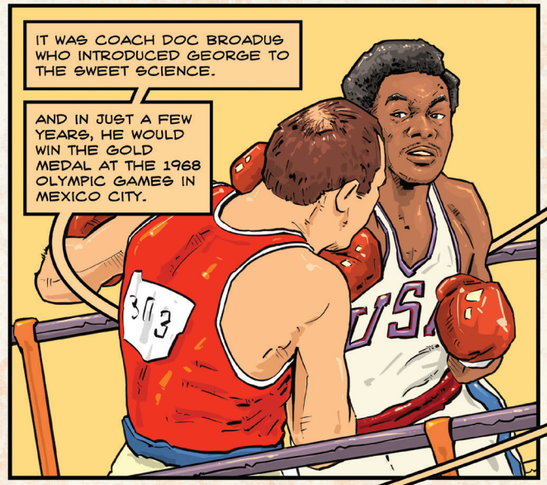
AN ILLUSTRATED JOURNEY THROUGH THE INCREDIBLE LIFE AND CAREER OF

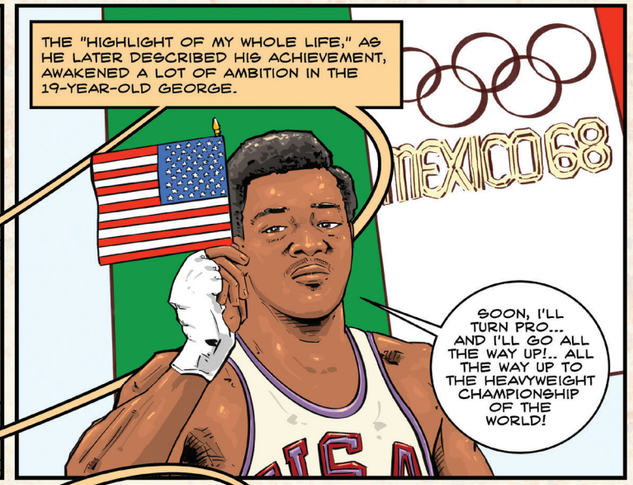
'BIG' GEORGE FOREMAN

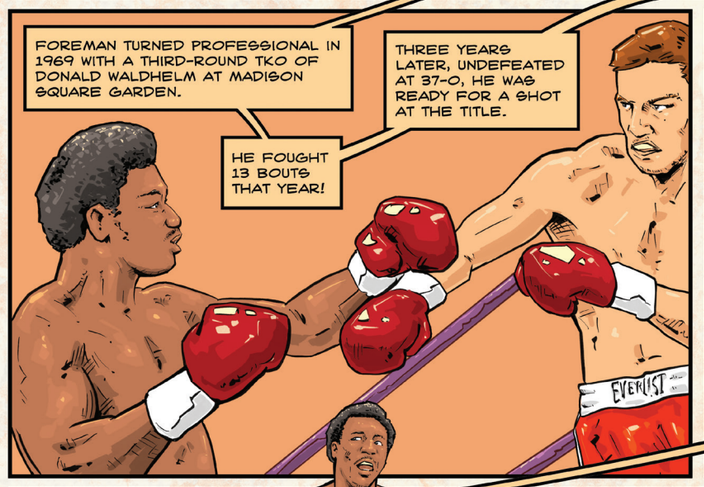


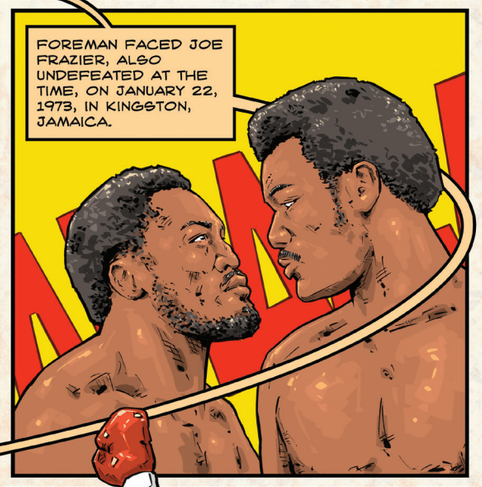


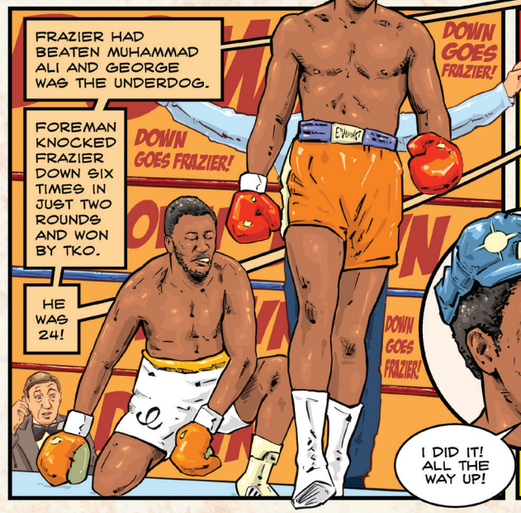


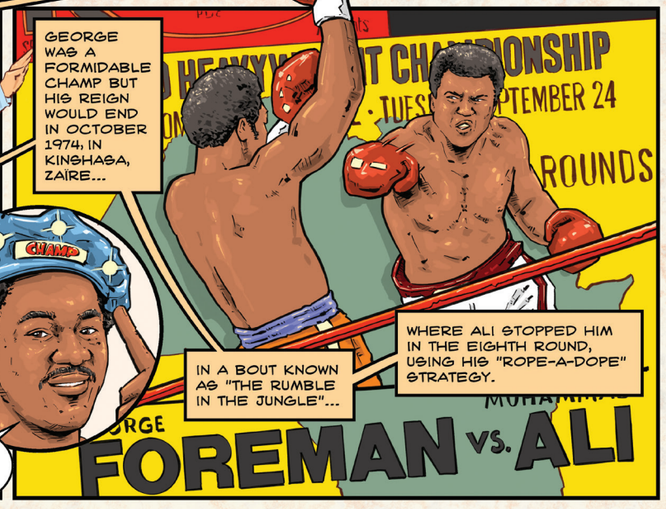












GEORGE TOOK LOSING HIS TITLE AND STATUS BADLY. FROM PRIDE TO PITY, HE SUFFERED DEPRESSION.

HE DID FIGHT A FEW MORE TIMES, INCLUDING A SECOND BOUT AGAINST FRAZIER, BEFORE LOSING TO JIMMY YOUNG IN 1977 IN PUERTO RICO.

THAT DAY, AN EXHAUSTED FOREMAN FELL IN THE LOCKER ROOM AFTER THE FIGHT. FEARING HE WAS DYING, HE HAD A VISION. HE HEARD A VOICE... THAT WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING.

THIS IS THE MOMENT HE DECIDED TO RETIRE AND DEDICATE HIS LIFE TO GOD.

IT LASTED FOR A DECADE.

NO MORE BOXING. FOREMAN FOUND FAITH AND BECAME A MINISTER AT THE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN HOUSTON.

The Church Of The Lord Jesus Christ
SERVICES
Sat 7:00 pm
Sun Morning 10:00 am
Sun 7:00 pm
Wed 7:00 pm

Holy Bible

BUT THE CHURCH, AND THE GEORGE FOREMAN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTER HE HAD CREATED, NEEDED MONEY. SO, AFTER 10 YEARS, FOREMAN SURPRISED THE BOXING WORLD BY ANNOUNCING HIS COMEBACK IN 1987. HE WAS 38 YEARS OLD.

FOR HIS FIRST FIGHT BACK, HE BEAT JOURNEYMAN STEVE ZOUSKI BY FOURTH-ROUND KO IN SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA.

BUT THE 25TH FIGHT OF HIS COMEBACK WAS OF A DIFFERENT CALIBER.

BILLED AS THE "BATTLE OF THE AGES," GEORGE FACED EVANDER HOLYFIELD FOR THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP ON APRIL 19, 1991, IN ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY.

THE BATTLE OF THE AGES

VS

FOREMAN SURPRISED MANY BY GOING THE DISTANCE AND LOSING WITH HONOR ON POINTS.

HOLYFIELD WOULD LATER ADMIT THAT "NO ONE PUNCHED HARDER THAN BIG GEORGE..."

BUT GEORGE'S INCREDIBLE STORY DID NOT STOP THERE.

ON NOVEMBER 5, 1994, AT AGE 45 AND AGAINST ALL ODDS, HE BEAT MICHAEL MOORER BY KO IN THE 10TH ROUND TO WIN THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP FOR THE SECOND TIME...

... A LITTLE MORE THAN 20 YEARS AFTER HIS VICTORY AGAINST FRAZIER.

There's nothing funny going on here!

IT HAPPENED!! IT HAPPENED!!

MOORER vs FOREMAN
WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP
HBO
SAT. NOV. 5 10PM ET/7PM PT

HE BECAME, AT THE TIME, THE OLDEST FIGHTER TO WIN A WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP.

FOREMAN WAS WEARING THE SAME TRUNKS THE NIGHT HE LOST TO ALI IN 1974.

THE REST IS HISTORY.

GEORGE RETIRED AFTER A CONTROVERSIAL LOSS TO SHANNON BRIGGS IN 1997, AT THE AGE OF 48, WITH A FINAL RECORD OF 76 WINS AND ONLY 5 LOSSES.

OUTSIDE OF THE RING, HE BECAME A SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR, FAMOUS FOR HIS PROMOTION OF HIS GRILL, THE GEORGE FOREMAN LEAN MEAN GRILLING MACHINE, WHICH SOLD OVER 100 MILLION WORLWIDE.

GREAT TASTING... HEALTHIER FOOD...

IN MINUTES!!

GEORGE FOREMAN GRILL

BUT, GEORGE WAS MORE THAN THAT...

GEORGE FOREMAN WAS INDUCTED INTO THE INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAME IN 2003. THE RING MAGAZINE RANKED HIM AS THE NINTH GREATEST PUNCHER OF ALL TIME.

HE WAS A RINGSIDE ANALYST FOR HBO FOR 12 YEARS.

OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST, TWO-TIME WORLD CHAMPION, PREACHER, BUSINESSMAN, ICON... BIG GEORGE FOREMAN WAS ABOVE ALL A GENTLEMAN, A TRUE LEGEND AND AN OUTSTANDING HUMAN BEING.

GEORGE FOREMAN IS BIGGER THAN LIFE.

HIS LEGACY LIVES ON AND HE WILL BE REMEMBERED FOREVER.

LEGENDS NEVER DIE...

MUHAMMAD ALI

TOLD YA...!!

THE BIG FELLAH IS HERE!!!

... THEY FINALLY GET TOGETHER AND HAVE A GOOD TIME!

AN EPIC JOURNEY TO GLORY

FROM GEORGE FOREMAN'S PRE-OLYMPIC DAYS THROUGH THE SIX DECADES THAT FOLLOWED, PUBLICIST **BILL CAPLAN** WAS THERE TO WITNESS THE RISE, FALL AND RETURN OF ONE OF BOXING'S GREATEST CHAMPIONS

By Gareth A Davies

Mirrorpix

Bill Caplan has lived through an extraordinary era of great heavyweights, working with Joe Louis and many others, but it was his longevity as George Foreman's PR man for almost six decades that represented one of the most enduring bonds in pugilism.

Unsurprisingly, Caplan, a legend himself in the media room, now proclaims that Big George is "unique" in boxing and that "no one has achieved what he did" in reference to Foreman's incredible feats: The great heavyweight stands alone in his achievements. He left the sport – retired for 10 years from the age of 28 to 38 – then came back and won the world title 20 years after losing it, extraordinarily, at the age of 45. It beggars belief even recounting those facts.

"No one, and I mean no one, has done that," Caplan asserted to me in the latest of many conversations we've had over the last two and a half decades. "Or, in my mind, will ever do again." Foreman passed on March 21, aged 76. Caplan was bereft over the death of his friend.

Indeed, Caplan, now 89, talking to me from his home in Los Angeles as he has in media rooms around the world and over many, many dinners, recounted more stories about Foreman and their experiences over the years. And what years they were.

The greatest adventure with Foreman, Caplan said, will always be "The Rumble In The Jungle," the most watched fight of all time, against Muhammad Ali for the heavyweight championship of the world. More on that a little later.

Caplan himself was brought up in Des Moines, Iowa, and was educated in boxing from a young age.

He says he was lucky: "I was a fan before being with George. Since I was a child. I used to listen to the great Joe Louis, who was heavyweight champion for 11 and a half years. I used to listen to his fights on the radio, because my father – who was an immigrant from Lithuania – was only interested in boxing. That was part of my growing-up process."

Caplan eventually found his way into the big time through a family member. "My brother-in-law, married to my older sister, was in the boxing business. There were six children in our family, and I am the youngest by far. [My brother-in-law] was 25 years older than I, took me to the fights and got me my first job with my boyhood hero, Joe Louis."

That was in 1963, with Louis then promoting fights in Hollywood. "My brother was involved in helping him make matches, and he needed a publicist – so it was a thrill as I fell into the job. I was 27 years old at the time. All I did before that job was go to fights, get familiar with the sport and the fighters, go to training camps, go to dinner with fighters and trainers and hang around the business.

"I'm so lucky, because my three all-time [favorite] fighters are Joe Louis, Oscar De La Hoya and George Foreman. I've worked for and been involved with all three of those guys more than any other fighter."

Bettmann

Foreman and Caplan maintained a tight bond for more than half a century.

But Caplan's life changed when he met Foreman. And it is a narrative of work and friendship that endured until the day the great man passed. "I met George when he was 18, before he went to the Olympics," Caplan explained. "To this day, I still consider myself to be George Foreman's publicist. I had started with George when he was an amateur with only six fights.

"It was a year later when he went to the Olympics and he won gold. He only had 21 fights when he went to the Olympics, which is nothing. He's there, 19 years old, and he's fighting professional amateurs from the Soviet countries. Their profession was fighting. That's what they did for a living. They were made officers in the army and provided money and a house and a car and expenses. They were professionals with years of experience. And here was this 19-year-old kid with this little American flag knocking them all out.

"By the way, the night I started with him, he lost his first amateur fight. It was his seventh fight. He wrote about this in his autobiography, which was a bestseller, called *By George*. He said in the book he was going to quit boxing, and then a celebrity came to the dressing room, a celebrity by the name of Bill Caplan, who patted him on the back and said, 'Don't worry about it, George. You're going to be a good fighter one day.'

"That's what really happened. We had had George's amateur fight and then an intermission that separated them from the professional fights. I walked back to the dressing room, and here's this kid sitting with his chin on his chest on the rubbing table, all alone. I tried to make him feel better, having no idea he was going to have the historic career he had. We became close friends from that day.

"He's an ordained minister. He's performed three weddings for my family. I am Jewish and he's a Christian minister. It doesn't matter. I can't name anybody outside my family that I'm closer to in life than George Foreman. I love George Foreman. And I think he kind of liked me too."

Always very and fascinatingly honest, Caplan places Foreman at No. 5 in his all-time heavyweight list. "Joe Louis was my boyhood hero, so on my personal list of heavyweight champions, he's number one. Ali is two and Larry Holmes is three, and my George Foreman is five and so on. Mike Tyson is 17. I did a top 20 list for Ring Magazine once. People would ask me, 'Why would you make Tyson number 17?' Because he never came from behind to win a fight, he never got off the deck to win a fight. That's why he's 17th on my list. He had great tools: speed, power – intimidation was his great tool. But for some reason, what he was great at was being a frontrunner and never coming from behind."

"He lost, I lost, but [The Rumble in the Jungle] was the greatest adventure of my career."

Caplan has total recall on so many events, and he lights up when talking about the relationship between Big George and Ali: "They became very good friends. Ali gave him his first defeat in October of 1974, of course. George was undefeated at the time. George had knocked the people out who had beaten Ali. One was Ken Norton, the other Joe Frazier. George knocked them both out easily. When Ali and Foreman were fighting in Africa, people were praying that George didn't kill Ali. They were worried. As it turned out, Ali did the rope-a-dope and let George punch himself out and survived all of that.

"I got a phone call a few years ago from George, and Ali wasn't speaking at the time, or at least publicly. I later learned that sometimes early in the day, for moments, he would be the old Ali. The articulate, entertaining Ali. He would do that at home. George called me and said, 'You'll never guess who I just talked to on the phone.' I said, 'OK, I can't guess. Who?' He said, 'Ali called me.' I said, 'What was that about?' He said he sounded like his old self. Ali said, 'George, how many grandchildren do you have?' George says, 'I have seven.' Ali says, 'Ha! I have 10. I beat you again.' In other words, he had that old spirit and that old sense of humor. George was so delighted, he had to call me and tell me."

There is, of course, the famous picture of when Ali knocked George down and Foreman went down in a spiral manner with one arm up in the air. Just before he hit the deck, the famous picture was taken. Caplan explains: "I believe it was a double truck, which means two pages in Sports Illustrated. I had been with George when people asked him for an autograph, and they would have that magazine that they had saved. George would say, 'Oh, listen, I'll sign your autograph, but give me something else to sign.' I saw that more than once. Then George built a new house. He lived in a fabulous house and built a new one and gave me the tour of his house one day, shortly after he'd moved into the new one, and we went into his office. In his office was a large monitor that he used for his computer, and on this big monitor his screensaver was that picture. I said, 'George, you would never sign that picture. Why would you use that as your screensaver, something you have to look at every day?' He said, 'It keeps me humble, Bill.' They had a

A prime Foreman weighs in for the Muhammad Ali fight in Zaire.

Bettmann

very unique relationship. I was happy to see it."

Now back to The Rumble in the Jungle. Caplan recalled the journey to Zaire with Foreman and entourage: "I've worked hundreds of fights in all these years since 1963, and it's right at the top of the list as the greatest adventure. Even though my guy lost, it was still the best. He lost, I lost, but it was the greatest adventure of my career. I flew in with George. It was quite a long trip from California. We went to Montreal, then to Paris, stayed overnight in Paris, and then took a red-eye flight, Air Zaire, which was quite an experience. We occupied the whole first class of the jumbo jet, and it was a Zaire crew and they were very accommodating. They left the door open to the cockpit for the entire flight, which, if I remember correctly, from Paris to Kinshasa, was roughly eight hours. They invited us to come up into the pilot's cabin whenever we wanted.

"We landed at sunset, and they gave us a little tour of the city before we landed. I'm sure we were less than a thousand feet up, and this jumbo jet circled the city about four times so we could have a look at it all."

There were 20 of them on the flight. "Foreman had five sparring partners, he had his doctor, his trainers, Dick Sadler, Sandy Saddler, Archie Moore and others in the entourage. There were 6,000 people on the tarmac at sunrise waiting for us to arrive. Ali got an even bigger greeting, of course. He got in one day before we did. We were supposed to be there for 10 days, but George got cut five days before the fight when a sparring partner stuck his elbow up in his eyes. We were there for two months in total. Bill McMurray was the sparring partner. He was the California heavyweight champion. A pretty good fighter, too.

"The fight was delayed for six weeks. George wanted to leave the country. He didn't like it there. Mobutu (the dictator president of Zaire) wouldn't allow him to leave, though. George just wanted to get out of there. Mobutu feared he would never come back, and he probably wouldn't have.

"Ali was the most famous person on Earth at that time. He could literally go into any country in the world, walk out onto the street and draw an immediate crowd. He was bigger than the president of the United States, the prime minister of England and the pope. None of them could do that without their entourage. Ali could walk anywhere and he'd have an immediate crowd. He did it in Zaire and had people following him by the hundreds. Everywhere they followed him, they were chanting, 'Ali bumaye! Ali bumaye!' ('Ali, kill him!') That would make anybody feel uncomfortable, and George was no different."

And what of "moody, growling George"?

"Oh, that was all an act," said Caplan. "George got that brooding stuff from Sonny Liston. When [Foreman] won the gold medal at age 19 in Mexico City, he waved his little American flag in celebration, and then he was put into a training camp with Sonny Liston. Then he said, 'That's been very effective for him. Now I'm going to do that.' It was just an act of intimidation. George was always a super-nice kid.

"I was a betting man in those days and I bet money on George. I laid down 3-to-1 odds; and it would have been 10-to-1, except he was fighting Muhammad Ali. Because Muhammad Ali was so loved and hated, and because he was the most famous person on Earth, the odds were 3½-to-1. If it was anyone else, it would have been 10-to-1. George had destroyed everyone else.

"The weigh-in day was again at the big soccer stadium where the fight was held. I said to George, 'Let's take a walk around the track.' They had a running track, and George walked around that quarter of a mile track and waved at the crowd. He actually got a lot of cheers. It made him feel better.

"Let me tell you what his disadvantage was, aside from the styles, which I've mentioned. George did not take stitches in that bad cut he suffered. He hated needles. So he made them do it with butterfly bandages. And because of that, in that six-week period, his sparring partners were not allowed to hit him above the chest. That was to his detriment."

So, to the fight, and Caplan's feelings as the contest played out: "Now we're in the fight and George whales on Ali in the first round. Ali is lying back on those very loose ropes, doing the rope-a-dope. George whales on him in the second round. Ali was taking terrible punishment but still leaning back on those ropes. At the end of the second round, I've got my ample belly up against the ring and I see George sucking in wind, breathing hard. I said to the photographer next to me, 'Oh my god, we're going to blow this fight.' Eventually we did. George was completely exhausted and, in the eighth round, Ali hit him with a good right hand and it was over. He got up as the referee said 10, and he thought he beat the count. But he was exhausted."

"Oh, that was all an act. George got that brooding stuff from Sonny Liston."

Caplan found the same downcast Foreman he had experienced years earlier: "George was very depressed afterwards. And here's what's going to sound self-serving: I got up in the ring, walked to the corner, patted him on the back and said, 'George, don't worry about it. It's not the end of the world. All the great fighters lose.' And they do. Sugar Ray Robinson lost 19 fights in his career. Joe Louis lost fights. All the greats did. Rocky Marciano was the only exception.

"Then we go to his dressing room, which was perhaps 20 by 30 feet, and so was Ali's. By this time, the skies had opened up and the monsoons were there. The fight just beat the monsoons. Ringside was flooded out. The teletype machines were flooded out. There were people packed in his dressing room. Wall-to-wall media. It was like a steam bath. George was just lying on his back, staring up at the ceiling, and suddenly he sat up and said, 'I have a statement to make.' Everybody had their notebooks poised and their pens ready. He said, 'I found a true friend tonight in Bill Caplan.' Now I almost passed out. I went weak at the knees. Why? Well, he wouldn't talk to me for the whole time that we were there. He'd only try and beat me at ping-pong. Zaire made him kind of crazy."

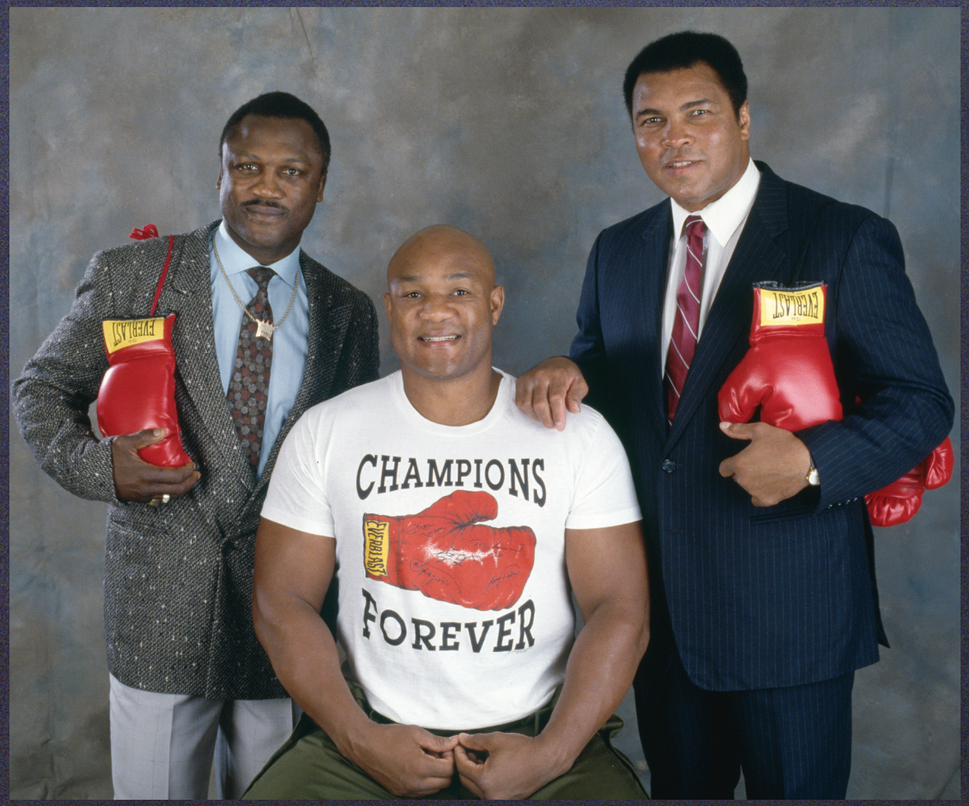
Looking back, Caplan celebrates being involved in such an important era: "During the golden age of heavyweights, you had George, Joe Frazier, Muhammad Ali, Kenny Norton and then about 10 or 12 or 15 really good heavyweights. There have never been so many good heavyweights in the history of the sport, which is why it's called the golden age of heavyweights in boxing. They all did numbers on each other. It was like a round-robin. They were all beating each other. It was a good lesson in 'styles make fights.' George knocked out Joe Frazier twice. He knocked out Kenny Norton. Joe Frazier and Kenny Norton gave Ali all the heck he wanted and had beaten Ali. And yet Ali beat George in Zaire. They were all doing numbers on each other. Why? Because of the styles. Styles mean everything in boxing."

When Foreman went into exile and then returned 10 years later, it was Caplan who was there again for his guy: "I actually helped him get his license in California. And California is not an easy state to get a license in. I helped him. I was not worried about him. Ten years of not fighting was like taking a vintage automobile and putting it in the garage and you don't drive it for 10 years. When you drive it out of there, it's still a new car, a good car."

So many memories, so many good times. "I was fortunate to meet George when he was a green, green amateur," said Caplan. "What a life he had. What a man. There will never be another like George. He really was special." RING

Gareth A Davies is the boxing correspondent for The London Daily Telegraph and TalkSPORT.

A KING



AMONG KINGS

GEORGE FOREMAN WAS ONE OF THE LAST REMAINING LINKS TO THE AGE OF LEGENDS THAT DEFINED BOXING IN THE 1970S.

By Thomas Gerbasi

Focus On Sport

George Foreman got quiet. It was unsettling, as any conversation with the iconic Hall of Famer was usually a voluble occasion as he fired off one-liners and used his self-effacing humor to put anyone at ease. But the topic of being one of the last men standing from an epic era of heavyweights had hit him hard.

"I never did visualize a world without them. And when they started passing, it hurt," Foreman told me in an interview for Boxing News back in 2012. "It's like a part of me died."

The man he won the title from, Joe Frazier, along with previous opponents Ron Lyle and Scott LeDoux, had passed away the year before. Ken Norton would follow in 2013. And perhaps the Texan's greatest rival, Muhammad Ali, died in 2016. Add in Jimmy Young (2005) and Jerry Quarry (1999), and it was a lonely time for one of the best heavyweights to ever lace up the gloves. And, despite being the owner of one of the sport's rare happy endings, he still had moments of sadness thinking of his fallen comrades.

"When we were young, truly young and kings, we didn't know how valuable we were to each other," he said. "We just didn't know."

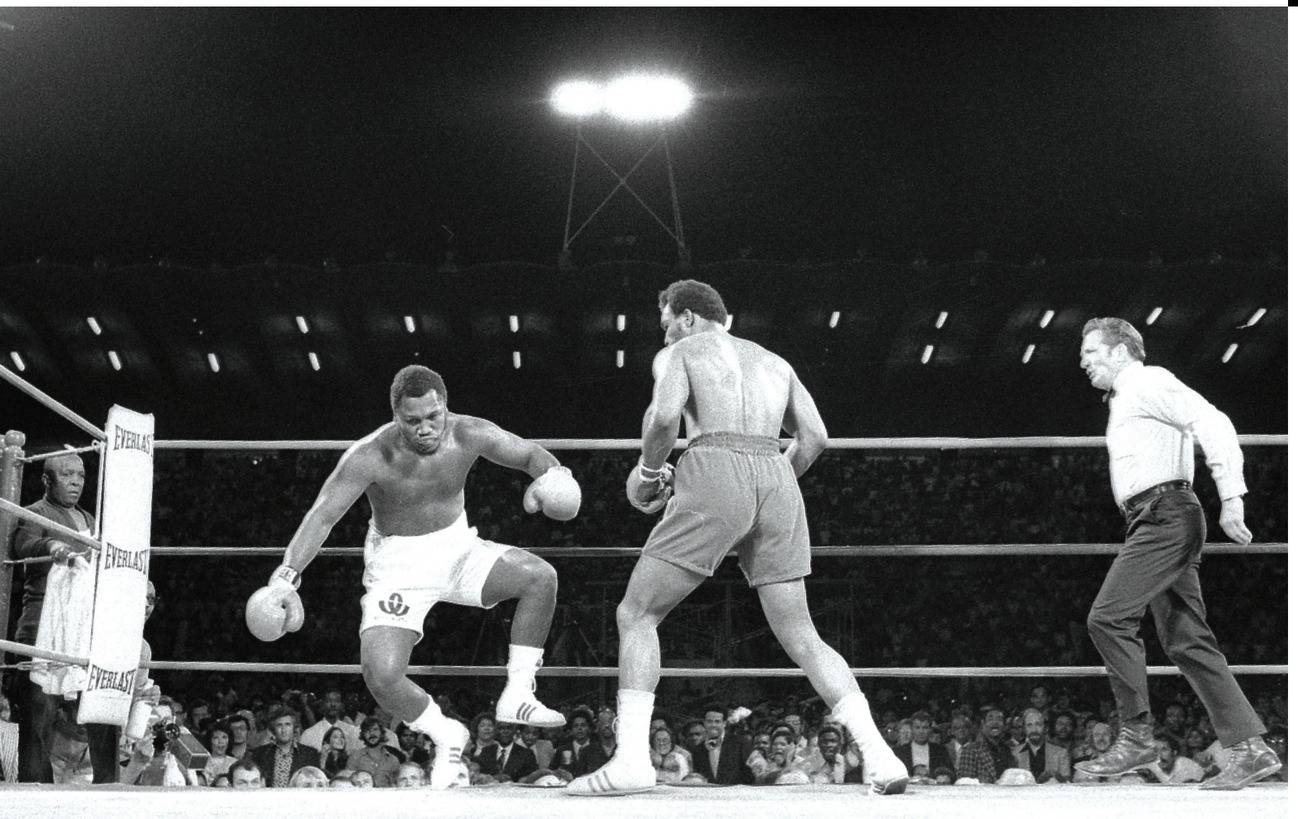
Foreman spoke of the Champions Forever video he filmed in 1989 with Ali, Frazier, Norton and another heavyweight great, Larry Holmes, and how Frazier scoffed at Foreman helping Ali (who was already stricken by Parkinson's disease) put his tie on.

"All of us were together in London, and nobody was taking care of Muhammad," recalled Foreman. "And Frazier was saying, 'Why are you helping him? Don't worry about it. What about all those guys he had all those years ago? Where are they now?' And I remember saying to Joe, 'Man, that's his whole story – that he's pretty. We gotta make certain that when he gets on the camera, he's pretty.' He says, 'Don't worry about it,' and I said, 'No, no, no. We've got to worry about each other and take care of each other. You gotta be Smokin' Joe, and he's got to be pretty, and I gotta be ol' Foreman.' They just didn't understand then."

Two years after London, Foreman was in the midst of his "second" career, and at 42, he was facing heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield. Before the opening bell, Ali and Frazier were introduced to the crowd at Convention Hall in Atlantic City.

"Each of them was introduced in the ring, and they walked out, and that was the first time I realized, 'What am I doing up here?'" said Foreman. "We were tied together like a chain. Frazier stepped out, Muhammad stepped out, and I should have stepped right on out,

Foreman won the title by annihilating Smokin' Joe Frazier.



Bettmann

too. (laughs) We were tied together, and there's not a day that goes by, even now, that I think of life and Frazier and Ali are not in it."

Sadly, the world lost Foreman in March 2025 at the age of 76. Of the 42 heavyweights who earned a place in The Ring's annual rankings from 1970 to 1979, only 13 remain with us. One of them is Gerry Cooney, the owner of a concussive left hook that most notably took him to a world title fight with Holmes in 1982. The Long Island native was even in the ring with three '70s stalwarts – Young, Lyle and Norton – needing six combined rounds to defeat the trio in 1980 and 1981, and his final fight was against Foreman himself in 1990. But before that, he was just a popular amateur who turned pro in 1977 with stars in his eyes and a healthy respect for his peers in the shark tank.

"I was in it at the end of it, and I loved watching those guys," said Cooney. "Look at Norton breaking Ali's jaw. Then when Ali fought Foreman, I thought, 'Oh my god. Please, Ali, don't take this fight. Don't fucking take it.' But Ali knew differently. He was a master manipulator. He worked you out before you got in the ring. He had this psychological edge besides being such a great fighter."

When the '70s began, Frazier was champion. Another Olympic gold medalist in Foreman was 13-0, and Ali, a third winner of Olympic gold, was about to return from his three-year exile – the result of his stance on the Vietnam War. When he did come back in October 1970, it wasn't against an easy mark but a legitimate top five contender in California's Quarry, who had already been in the ring with Frazier and held wins over Brian London, Floyd Patterson and Buster Mathis.

Ali beat Quarry in three rounds, then defeated the ultra-tough Oscar Bonavena before the "Fight of the Century" on March 8, 1971, against Frazier. In a lot of ways, that's when the '70s truly began in what was always boxing's glamor division.

Muhammad Ali handed Foreman the first loss of his pro career.

"The heavyweight division used to hold up boxing," said Cooney, and he's right to a degree. When there are big fights, like the recent series between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury or the Fury-Deontay Wilder trilogy, the fistic world stops, and the mainstream world even tunes in. For the most part, though, it's the lighter weight classes, featuring the likes of Canelo Alvarez, Terence Crawford, Gervonta Davis and Naoya Inoue, that are capturing the imagination of fight fans. It has been that way since the time of The Four Kings – Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns, Roberto Duran and Marvelous Marvin Hagler – took over the sport in the post-Ali era. There would be Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis and Holyfield having their moments in the sun,

but those appearances were sporadic compared to the days when a stellar collective of heavyweights fought each other on a regular basis, often on free network television. And when there was a big closed-circuit event, like the "Rumble in the Jungle" or "Thrilla in Manila," the world – not just the boxing world, but the entire globe – stopped.

These days, most if not all big fights are behind a paywall, either through pay-per-view or a streaming service. And with main events broadcast after 11 p.m., late-night adults are well into other weekend plans and their kids are in bed before they get to see their favorite fighters, if they even have them. Those who grew up in the era of Ali, Frazier and Foreman had no such issues seeing their heroes on the small screen, and with newspapers having beat writers covering every move of the champions and contenders, there was no shortage of access to the stories behind the men in the ring.

"People knew who the heavyweight champ was then," Holmes told me in 2014. "The Easton Assassin" turned pro in 1973 and won the world title in a 1978 classic with Norton that was one of the greatest heavyweight title fights in boxing history. Before that victorious night in Las Vegas, Holmes made his bones on undercards and in the gym as a sparring partner for both Ali and Frazier. It was a necessary process for fighters back then, as the money wasn't there like it is today, thanks to lucrative broadcast deals and a host of high-powered promoters who have prospects making decent money from the formative days of their careers.

Holmes made $63 (no typo) for his pro debut against Rodell Dupree. And that's for a man who became one of the greatest heavyweights of all time. So there was little cherry-picking of opponents or the idea of "cultivating" a particular road to the title. In the '70s, fighters fought, because that was the only way they got paid, and they couldn't be choosy about who stood across from them on fight night. Sure, they were true fighters with all the heart in the world and they wanted the glory that came with being a champion, but, in the end, it was economics.

"I was greedy. I was hungry," Holmes laughed. "I wanted to prove to people that I could fight, for one thing, and I wasn't just a fly-by-nighter. People used to tell me that I can't do it, and I said, 'OK, fine. I can't do it.' But I just kept on going – actions speak louder than words."

Jerry Izenberg was one of those boxing beat writers who covered all the great '70s fights and fighters for New Jersey's Star-Ledger newspaper and wrote about that era in his 2017 book Once There Were Giants. "The history of the heavyweight title tells you something that people never see," he said. "I have yet to see a Harvard cum laude or Johns Hopkins graduate say, 'I think I'll try boxing and get hit in the face.' The Jews were the bottom of the [economic] scale. Then the Poles and the Irish started getting better fights. Then after them came the Blacks, and after them came the Latinos. And now it's the Latinos and the people from Eastern Europe. So if a guy ain't hungry, he's not going to even try."

The heavyweights of that era were certainly hungry, and they were also competing at a time when boxing was running neck and neck with baseball for the attention of sports fans in the United States. The NFL was rapidly rising in popularity, but the NBA was far from mainstream, with championship games being aired on tape delay instead of live. So if you were an athlete with a 6-foot-3, 225-pound build like Foreman, boxing gave you a better shot at succeeding and making some big paydays than becoming a tight end or shooting guard.

In response, many rolled the dice. And while big men in later decades moved into different sports to improve their economic standing, a group of special athletes in the '70s decided to chase a title often referred to as "Boxing's Mr. President." The odds were high, but the rewards were great, and to get there, you had to fight all comers who had the same dream you did.

Foreman knocked out Ron Lyle in The Ring's Fight of the Year for 1976 ...

... then lost a decision to Jimmy Young in The Ring's 1977 Fight of the Year.

"Now, most of the guys handpick their opponents," longtime heavyweight contender Earnie Shavers told me in 2018. "We didn't handpick. We just fought everybody. And I'm glad I fought in that era, because it taught me how to fight, take care of myself and earn a name. But now they handpick them, and when you fight a top guy, you get beat. You've gotta start a guy and let him fight. That's how I started. I started late, so my trainer said, 'Earnie, you cannot afford to make any mistakes, so listen to me.' I did everything he said to do – hard work, training, no smoking, no drinking. The worst habit I ever had – one time – I bought two scoops of ice cream instead of one – and that's it. (laughs) But he told me what I could do if I took care of myself and trained hard and listened to him. And I did, and it opened doors for me – money-wise and everything else."

Shavers was a prime example of a '70s heavyweight. Take away the decade's top dogs – Ali, Frazier, Foreman, Holmes, Norton – and you have a collection of fighters that could, on any given night, upset the apple cart and/or win a world title. Jimmy Young ended the first chapter of Foreman's career by beating him in 1977, and many believe the Philadelphian did enough to beat Ali in their title fight a year earlier. Quarry is considered by many to be one of the best fighters to never win a heavyweight title. Leon Spinks famously defeated Ali in 1978 with only seven pro fights under his belt, and Ron Lyle engaged in a five-round war with Foreman that was The Ring's Fight of the Year in 1976. A lot of folks believe that if you take any of those contenders from the '70s and drop them into the modern era, they'd win at least a portion of a title. As for Shavers, as he tells it, dropping Holmes in the seventh round with a rocket of a right hand resulted in the shortest heavyweight championship reign of all time.

"You know, I was champ for five seconds," laughed Shavers. "But Larry got up and he wasn't happy."

No, he wasn't.

"He made me mad," laughed Holmes. "I wanted to prove people wrong. If Earnie Shavers knocked me out, you know what they'd be saying about me?"

Holmes won in the 11th round, and the world saw it for free on ABC. It was a different world with a different kind of fighter. Foreman, who landed an analyst's gig for HBO from 1992 to 2004, saw the writing on the wall for the heavyweights when he spoke to me in 2012.

"We're running into a sad era, and things are just not good," he said. "I wish I could fix it. I think all the time that it wasn't that I was a good champion or a heavyweight champion of the world or that Muhammad Ali was that great, but we certainly were heroes for people to talk about, and I wish this generation had just a few. I don't know the reason, and there have been a lot of people to calculate and take a guess at the reasons, but there aren't any. We just don't have 'em. Jerry Quarry, Thad Spencer, Ernie Terrell. Where did they come from? They were bigger than Earth, and no one was bigger than the greatest show on Earth: Muhammad Ali. Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson, I could go on and on and on. They were like angelic figures that stayed in your mind, and you'd never get them out. I wish the young kids could have that again."

Will they? Since the days when Ali, Frazier, Foreman and their peers ruled boxing, we've had Tyson, Holyfield, Lewis, Riddick Bowe, the Klitschko brothers, Fury, Usyk, Wilder and Joshua to hold up their end of the bargain. But those '70s heavyweight killers?

"We need magic to come around," said Cooney. "And every so often, it happens." RING

Miracle

ON Las Vegas BLVD

GEORGE FOREMAN VS. MICHAEL MOORER WAS ALREADY A GOOD STORY BEFORE THE FIRST BELL, BUT THE EVENT THAT UNFOLDED WAS TRULY ASTONISHING

By Michael Rosenthal

George Foreman's impossible dream of regaining the heavyweight championship at 45 years old was slipping away. Michael Moorer, 19 years his junior and a future Hall of Famer, had made Big George look his age for nine-plus rounds on a historic fall night in 1994 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. The talented southpaw champion fought behind a right jab that the old man couldn't see, let alone avoid, to build a big lead. Foreman, it seemed to me at ringside, was on his way to a one-sided loss in his bid to become the oldest boxer to capture a world title. »

JOHN GURZINSKI

Then, at a moment when reality morphed into fantasy, the 16,000 in attendance and those watching worldwide suddenly, dramatically were bedazzled by magic. One mighty blow from Foreman put Moorer down and out in Round 10, instantaneously sparking mayhem in the Grand Garden Arena and consummating one of the greatest comebacks in sports history in the most thrilling fashion possible.

Yes, Jim Lampley, "It happened! It happened!" And you didn't have to be a boxing aficionado to be moved by the moment.

Foreman was already a household name at the time of the fight, a jovial former champion-turned-minister-turned George Foreman grill pitchman who returned to boxing after a 10-year hiatus. Everyone loved him.

That's why it's not a stretch to assert that few of those viewing – inside the arena or out – were pulling for Moorer, a nondescript former light heavyweight titleholder who had won the IBF and WBA heavyweight belts by outpointing Evander Holyfield six-plus months earlier. I was no exception. Professional journalists are required to remain neutral at all times, an unwritten law to which I ascribed that night. On the outside. On the inside, sitting on press row, a romantic part of me wanted to see this legend make history.

It was never destined to be easy.

Some background: In 1974, fighting in what was then called Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Foreman lost his perfect record and the championship by an eighth-round knockout against Muhammad Ali in their classic "rope-a-dope" bout (aka "The Rumble in the Jungle"). He then "retired" after an upset loss to Jimmy Young in 1977, after which he became the minister of a small church in his hometown of Houston.

A decade later, Foreman stunned the boxing world by announcing his return to the ring, primarily to raise money for his struggling youth center but also because he had unfinished business. Was he serious? At 38, he was no longer the youthful specimen who had overwhelmed opponents in the 1970s but a middle-aged man battling weight issues, which raised doubts about his prospects. However, he was still immensely powerful, resilient and determined, as he proved by winning the first 24 fights of his comeback – all but one by knockout.

Then he seemed to hit his ceiling, losing a clear decision to then-champion Holyfield in 1991, taking a beating against Alex Stewart in a controversial points victory the following year and losing another one-sided decision to Tommy Morrison in the fight immediately preceding his meeting with Moorer. He still had the desire – he had no intention of giving up – but the aging process appeared to be taking a toll. He couldn't keep pace with younger opponents, at least not the best ones.

That's why he was a 2-to-1 underdog against Moorer, a seasoned boxer who had master motivator Teddy Atlas in his corner the night of November 5. And many believed those odds were generous.

I thought Foreman had a chance to win the fight because of his punching power – remember his eye-popping final

record, 76-5 (68 KOs) – and the fact Moorer had fought at 175 pounds less than four years earlier, although, in my mind, it was a small chance. Foreman's weak performance against Morrison indicated to me that his days as a force in the heavyweight division were behind him.

And most of the fight against Moorer bore that out. The left-handed titleholder landed his snapping right jab almost at will, which set up power punches – his right hook was particularly effective – and allowed him to control the action round after round. Foreman landed clean shots here and there and was never hurt by Moorer, but he couldn't get anything done. He was too slow to defend himself, too slow to put enough punches together to turn the tide. And, perhaps remarkably, Moorer took everything thrown at him.

It was a painfully one-sided fight, as the official scores after nine rounds indicated: Judges Chuck Giampa and Jerry Roth had it 88-83 (seven rounds to two) while Duane Ford somehow had a card of 86-85 (five rounds to four) for Moorer. I had Moorer ahead 89-82.

The spectators in the arena – hoping for something monumental – also had their moments, screaming their approval whenever Foreman landed anything they could see. However, they were deflated and relatively quiet by the second half of the fight, as it appeared less and less likely that Foreman would give them what they came for. I've never seen so many disappointed faces.

An accomplished sports columnist sitting directly to my right, seven or eight rows from the ring, openly bemoaned the mismatch from around the third round on. "This fight should never have been made," he said. "This is a travesty, a 45-year-old has-been in the ring with a prime champion. … This is what the heavyweight division has evolved into? … Everyone involved should be embarrassed." You get the idea.

I didn't have precisely the same perspective, although I certainly couldn't argue with my fellow journalist. I believed Foreman had a puncher's chance at the opening bell, and I thought the same thing before the bell to start Round 10, but it looked bad for the underdog with nine minutes of boxing remaining.

That's one thing that made the ending so spectacular. At the time, it seemed to come out of nowhere. One second Foreman's mission appeared to be impossible, the next he was champion.

"This fight should never have been made. This is a travesty, a 45-year-old has-been in the ring with a prime champion."

Foreman carved his final niche in boxing lore with a textbook one-two: a left jab that opened Moorer's guard and a vintage straight right hand to the chin that put him onto his back, after which Moorer struggled to get up but failed as referee Joe Cortez counted him out 2 minutes, 3 seconds into the 10th round. Of course, no one in the arena could hear Cortez counting. The moment he hit the canvas, the noise generated by the roaring fans must have rivaled that of a jet engine. I remember thinking afterward, "Man, I could have screamed at the top of my lungs and still not have heard myself." I swear the casino shook.

I would learn later about Lampley's famous "It happened! It happened!" call on HBO. I had a similar first thought, but it came in the form of a question as I stood and held my head with my mouth wide open, like so many others: "DID that just happen?!" I couldn't believe what I just saw.

Foreman's longtime publicist and future Hall of Famer Bill Caplan recently told me that he all but lost his mind after the final punch landed, a lapse of self-control that could've changed the course of boxing history. Caplan rushed to the ring and started up the steps to begin celebrating before Cortez had finished counting.

Fortunately for him – and perhaps Foreman – he was stopped.

"When George hit him with the right hand and knocked him back the way he did," Caplan said, "I started to go up the stairs, I think at the count of three. Two Vegas cops, the security in the corner, both grabbed me and yelled, 'Hey, you can't go now!' and they set me down on the floor. Then, when the count reached 10, they helped me up the stairs and said, 'OK, NOW you can go up!'

"Can you imagine how ridiculous that would've been? I could've gotten George disqualified. Those cops saved that from happening. In my 60-some years in boxing, that was my No. 1 thrill."

Ron Borges, a Boston Globe columnist at the time who also was destined to enter the Hall, sat a few rows in front of me that night. He knew immediately that Moorer wasn't getting up.

"I thought George was dangerous," Borges told me recently, referring to his thoughts going into the fight. "That's why [Mike] Tyson never fought him. Did I think he was going to beat Moorer? Not really. Moorer had a lot of skills. And as it was going along, Moorer won almost every minute of the fight. I [later] said that to George, that he lost every minute of that fight. He said, 'Yes, except the last 10 seconds. And that's all that matters.'"

John Iacono

Foreman's right hand canceled out any advantage Moorer had on the scorecards.

The significance of Foreman's victory over Moorer was manifold. He realized his goal of becoming the oldest boxer to win a world title, a feat that was topped when Bernard Hopkins won a belt at 46 years old 17 years later. Foreman regained the title almost exactly 20 years after he lost it to Ali, which exorcised ghosts that had harassed him for two decades. The achievement was so monumental that it removed any doubt – if there was any – about his place among the all-time greats.

And, perhaps more important than anything else, it proved that one can accomplish great things at any age with enough grit.

"It was never done before," Caplan said. "And I'm not talking about just boxing. I've challenged my sportswriter friends by asking whether anyone else in a major sport has done this: return from a 10-year layoff and regain a championship 20 years after you lost it. No one has been able to come up with a name. If anybody else has done something like that, I'd like to hear who it is."

Or as analyst Larry Merchant put it on the broadcast moments after the knockout: "This was a 2-to-1 fight, but in my mind it was gazillion-to-1 that George Foreman could ever win the heavyweight championship again. This is a really remarkable achievement. And it has to stand on its own."

The significance certainly wasn't lost on Foreman, who needed 29 fights over seven years in his late 30s and 40s to do the impossible. He was outwardly grateful, even humbled.

The images that followed the knockout also are indelible. Cortez waving his arms as he stood over Moorer. Foreman, a bit stunned himself, looking skyward and then kneeling gracefully in a corner of the ring to thank his god amid the deafening din. His teammates mobbing him in that position, including his gleeful promoter, Bob Arum, who clinched Foreman as tightly as any opponent ever had in the ring.

I remember glancing around me before I sat down to write, at both my colleagues near me and those in the crowd. Most of my fellow writers didn't have time to take in the moment; they had deadlines to meet. Imagine putting into words one of the sport's most important moments in a matter of minutes at what amounted to a wild party. Not easy. The fans, almost all on their feet, were free to celebrate. They hollered, they beamed, they high-fived, they hugged. A few had tears in their eyes.

And why not? It was a wonderful, fairy tale-like story, a theme Foreman embraced after the fight. The post-fight news conference quote I liked best – one I used near the top of my article – was a reference to the song "Over the Rainbow" in the film *The Wizard of Oz*:

"Bluebirds fly over the rainbow, why oh why can't I?"

Obviously, Foreman had those words in the bank just in case he got his hand raised that night. And they were perfect, evoking the idea that one could surpass what seemed reasonable at the time. That's exactly what Foreman did by never giving up on himself.

Boxing never had a more memorable night. RING

WITH HIS CAREER SPLIT IN HALF BY A 10-YEAR HIATUS, GEORGE FOREMAN SHOWED THE WORLD TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF HIMSELF – AND BOTH WERE REMARKABLE

by Don Stradley

A TALE OF TWO GEORGES

How lucky were we to have had not one but two George Foremans? No one would've predicted that the brooding destroyer of the 1970s would return in the late 1980s as a jolly, lovable media sensation. With an Olympic gold medal and a series of important fights that helped define an era, the early Foreman had already done enough to be a historically significant fighter. Yet it was the later Foreman, jogging to the ring in his ragged red robe, making jokes about his love of cheeseburgers, who became a sort of folk hero. Along with staging perhaps the greatest sports comeback of all time, Foreman II marketed his fun-loving personality into a $300 million empire. »

The news of Foreman's recent passing was greeted by tributes from around the world, a reaction that would've been unthinkable for the first incarnation of Big George. The 1970s Foreman was a powerful, idiosyncratic fighter, moody, mean and misunderstood, a figure whose bearing was described by Norman Mailer as "a lion standing just as erectly as a man." The 1990s version was a unique blend of slightly mismatched parts, as if a shopping mall Santa revealed himself to be a superhero. It was a combination that his adoring public found irresistible. Whether he was poking fun at himself or offering moving references to God, hope and faith, it was apparent that Foreman had evolved tremendously during his hiatus from boxing, a decade spent as an ordained minister. Two Foremans? Maybe there were more.

Though the second version of Foreman was surely more popular than the earlier one – it's impossible to imagine the young Foreman as a Doritos pitchman – it was trickier to discern which of the two Foremans was better in the ring. Before his sudden exit in 1977 at age 28, the first Foreman chalked up a record of 45-2 (42 KOs). The Foreman who began the second act of his career at 38 compiled a respectable record of 31-3 (26 KOs). Many in the press were dubious of the later model (and unkind), so comparisons usually favored the 1970s version. But by the time he scored his title-winning knockout of Michael Moorer in 1994, it was clear that both versions of Foreman had made an impact on the boxing business, and his critics on press row could celebrate his victory by eating their words.

With his story coming to a sad conclusion on March 21, 2025, it's tempting to once again compare the two versions of Foreman. Just for entertainment purposes, let's examine the two Georges in eight categories and see how things add up:

Foreman destroyed the great Ken Norton in less than two rounds.

Bettmann

POWER

There was a mysterious quality to young Foreman's power. He could land devastating punches with only the barest attention to proper technique. He could hit a man on top of the head and knock him down. But while it appeared he threw wide punches with almost no leverage, his talent was for finding the perfect distance between himself and his opponent, just right for launching his long uppercuts and sweeping hooks.

Granted, opponents could see his punches coming. That's why he didn't score many single-shot knockouts. Rivals saw those wrecking balls flying toward them and they'd freeze, stiffening up as Foreman made contact. A lot of his opponents would end up dazed but still on their feet, with referees stepping in before Foreman could do more damage. He may not have possessed the crisp knockout punching of, say, vintage Joe Louis, but he had thudding power, the sort that left opponents wishing they'd chosen another profession. In Foreman's most impressive performances of that era, the two-round demolition of Joe Frazier for the championship and his equally quick victory over the formidable Ken Norton, Foreman looked invincible.

The second incarnation of Foreman could punch too. A selection of his greatest hits from this period would include the brutal left-hook knockout of Adilson Rodrigues, the two-round blowout of Gerry Cooney and, of course, the right hand that put Moorer down for a 10 count. Evander Holyfield, who fought some good hitters in his time, has gone on record saying Foreman punched the hardest. At one point in their 1991 fight, Holyfield returned to his corner convinced that Foreman had knocked his teeth out.

Both versions of Foreman could wallop, but the 1970s Foreman was a destructive force of nature the likes of which boxing has rarely seen.

Winner: 1970s Foreman

RING GENERALSHIP

The Foreman of the 1970s came out swinging as if he held a hammer in each hand. He was also competent at slipping and parrying, and he had a unique way of tipping an opponent off-balance. His trick was to put a glove on the man's shoulder and keep him from getting set. This technique was put to great use against Frazier and created room for Foreman to throw those big uppercuts. But the young Foreman could be outsmarted and tire, as was the case in his dramatic losses to Muhammad Ali and Jimmy Young. And if an opponent showed some movement and counterpunching, as Gregorio Peralta did in their 1970 fight, Foreman was less effective.

The 1990s Foreman was a different creature. Because of his age and extra weight, he became adept at conserving his energy, expending no more than was required. The later Foreman also developed a strong left jab, which had been absent in the old days. In the first of his many autobiographies, Foreman wrote that adding this jab was the difference between his previous self and the new. "If the new George were somehow to meet the old George in the ring," he wrote, "the new George would win." Foreman added, "I'd learned to pace myself and set up the knockout with precision instead of brute strength."

Indeed, the second version of Foreman was craftier than the powerhouse of the 1970s.

Winner: 1990s Foreman

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

The young Foreman could grow flustered if things didn't go his way. He was a bit of a head case in those early days, glum and petulant. The loss to Ali in 1974 seemed to ruin him mentally, and by his own admission he suffered the effects for a long time. Yet he showed some great courage against Ron Lyle in 1976, when he was dropped twice and badly hurt but came back to score a fifth-round KO in The Ring's Fight of the Year.

The 1990s Foreman entered the ring with unshakable conviction. Even if he was tagged and visibly stunned, he seemed like a mountain, unmovable. Alex Stewart hit him often in their 1992 fight and caused Foreman's face to swell, but Foreman kept coming, earning a majority decision. Then there was the way he stayed calm and focused while losing nearly every round to Moorer, just waiting to bang home that decisive right hand. Such patience and determination were hallmarks of the later-period Foreman.

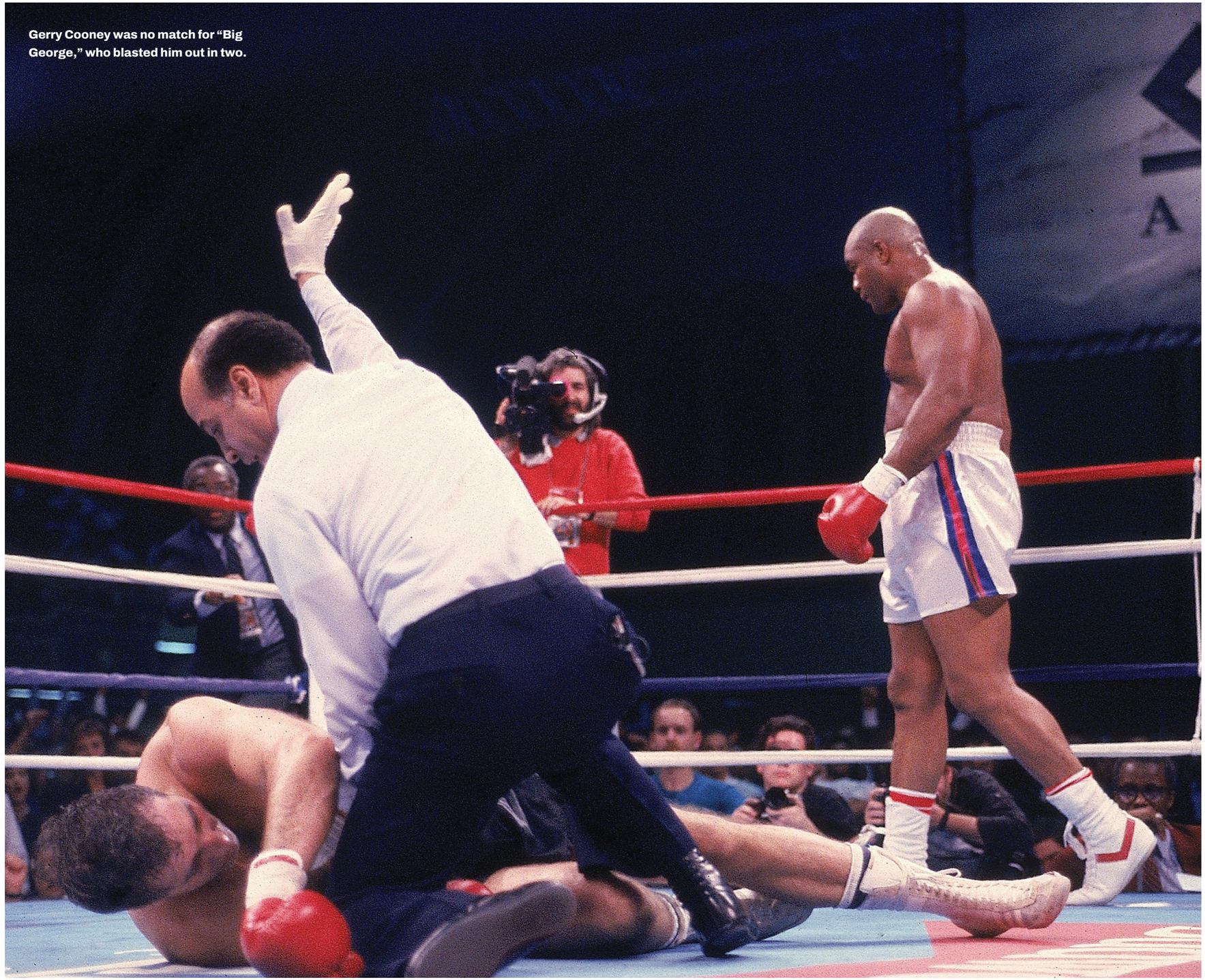
This category is a close call. But while Foreman showed some incredible fortitude against Lyle in the 1970s, it was in his second incarnation that his mental toughness was fully realized.

Winner: 1990s Foreman

DEFENSE

Hands down, 1990s Foreman was superior in this department. After all, when you're knocking opponents across the ring, as Foreman did in the 1970s, you don't think much about protecting yourself. That's why young George found himself on the canvas a bunch of times. Foreman was never knocked down during the second phase of his career. A big part of his success in the 1990s was that he'd adopted the old cross-armed defense that had been used by Archie Moore, who was Foreman's trainer for a time. Opponents had trouble cracking that shell.

Winner: 1990s Foreman



Gerry Cooney was no match for "Big George," who blasted him out in two.

Heinz Kluetmeier

KILLER INSTINCT

After spending his youth as a street thug in Houston's dangerous Fifth Ward neighborhood, young Foreman came into boxing with a killer instinct baked into him. He liked to batter opponents and humiliate them. He confessed in his memoir that he would stare at them thinking, "I'm going to kill you."

The more mature Foreman eschewed such vulgar behavior. He was out to win fights, not hand out concussions. Yet the mature Foreman's lighthearted approach hampered him at times, particularly during his decision loss to Tommy Morrison. He would later say that he had grown to like Morrison and didn't want to hurt him. And on a few occasions, Foreman had an opponent hurt only to let them off the hook. It appeared the old urge to knock a rival's head off had been dampened by Foreman's newfound love of humanity. This was great for him spiritually but may have worked against him in close fights.

Winner: 1970s Foreman

OPPOSITION

No doubt, the 1970s were a golden era for heavyweights, and Foreman competed with the best. Along with Ali, Norton, Lyle, Young and Frazier (twice), Foreman faced such perennial contenders as George Chuvalo, Chuck Wepner and Scott LeDoux.

Though the second edition of Foreman was often razzed for fighting so many washed-up journeymen, he did eventually meet some quality fighters, the best being Holyfield. Though he lost in that encounter, Foreman gained some satisfaction in beating Moorer, who'd defeated "The Real Deal." The Clinton-era Foreman also defeated such solid opponents as Pierre Coetzer and Lou Savarese. Though the judges saw it differently, Foreman also gave a boxing lesson to Shannon Briggs in his final fight, just weeks prior to his 49th birthday. Still, Foreman's later opponents didn't compare to the greats he fought the first time around.

Winner: 1970s Foreman

TITLE REIGN

A key to a fighter's place in history is how he wins the championship and how he performs while he's the champion. Foreman's two title wins were both momentous events. His victory over Frazier in Jamaica was one of the most dramatic title changes in boxing history. Contemporary fans may not realize how Foreman's win sent tremors across the sports world, or how shocking it was to see Foreman, an untested 3½-to-1 underdog, manhandle a phenomenal champion such as Frazier. Foreman followed with an easy first-round KO of Jose Roman in Japan and a two-round dusting of Norton in Venezuela. The way he won these bouts made Foreman seem like a leviathan. That's why he was favored over Ali when they fought in Africa. As short as it may have been, Foreman's first reign as champion was highly impressive.

The young Foreman was downright awkward next to a social savant like Muhammad Ali.

Skip ahead to November 5, 1994, when 45-year-old Foreman KO'd Moorer for the IBF and WBA titles. Foreman became the oldest man to win the heavyweight crown, which was the feel-good story of the year. Yet once the joy faded, Foreman's second run as a titlist was problematic. His age showed more than ever. He struggled to win close decisions. When Foreman refused the demands of the IBF and WBA, he said goodbye to both alphabet belts. Lucrative fights with Mike Tyson, Riddick Bowe and others fell through during negotiations. Despite being the lineal heavyweight king, fans and the press saw Foreman not as a dominating champion but as a novelty.

Foreman's first reign may have been brief at 21 months, but it beat the confusing mess of his second term.

Winner: 1970s Foreman

SELF-PROMOTION

This category might seem a landslide victory for late-period Foreman, but 1970s George was no slouch at putting himself over. In fact, when he emerged from the 1968 Summer Olympics, he presented himself as a wholesome character, espousing traditional American values. Even when he became a more truculent character, he occasionally showed a dry wit and could shut journalists down with brusque answers.

Foreman's second incarnation was a personable showman.

And though the 1990s Foreman was a regular face on television, young Foreman was hardly a wallflower, making cameo appearances on NBC's Sanford and Son (where he was very funny and held his own with series star Redd Foxx), and ABC's The Six Million Dollar Man.

And what about that crazy afternoon in Toronto when Foreman took on five opponents? The press despised the carnival-like atmosphere, and some feared Foreman had lost his mind, but it showed that even back in the 1970s, Foreman was interested in selling himself and being a bit outrageous. Foreman later acknowledged the Toronto event was a misfire. "I meant it in good fun," he wrote, but added that such a spectacle "was strictly Ali's domain."

If 1970s Foreman was awkward at winning fans and influencing people, that changed in the 1990s. He became an expert. He played the press like a maestro. It was amazing to see.

But even Foreman admitted that he could overdo the ballyhoo. Later he blamed his loss to Holyfield on his spending too much time amusing reporters. "I didn't know how to turn off the entertainer in me," he wrote. Still, Holyfield-Foreman raked in $55 million and smashed all previous records for pay-per-view buys. It was Foreman, not Holyfield, who made the fight a must-see event. Since Holyfield was not a hot ticket item, Foreman knew it was up to him to sell the fight. And sell it he did, just as he would do with grills and mufflers.

Winner: 1990s Foreman

There you have it. Young George was more powerful, with more killer instinct, better opposition and a more impressive title reign, while Foreman redux was superior as far as defense, mental toughness, ringcraft and showmanship. They're tied at four categories apiece. Of course, comparing 1970s Foreman to 1990s Foreman is just for amusement. They were different men with different strengths and weaknesses. Each was extraordinary.

Foreman might be the only fighter who deserves two separate plaques at the International Boxing Hall of Fame, one for his younger self, and one for Foreman part II. Both incarnations of Foreman are worthy of enshrinement. Together, the two combined for one of the most amazing careers in boxing.

Because his modesty wouldn't allow it, there'd be no puffed-up proclamations from Foreman about where he stood among the great ones. He once told author Stephen Brunt that he had no interest in such things.

"I liked winning, and I liked what I accomplished," Foreman said, "but to put my name in there, to mess with Joe Louis and Muhammad and Archie Moore and all those guys, I don't want anything to do with that."

Too late, George. You are one of the greats.

Or maybe we should say two of the greats. RING

THE CYCLONE IN THE STORM

AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S VIOLENT PERIOD KNOWN AS "THE TROUBLES," **BARRY MCGUIGAN'S** VICTORY OVER FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPION EUSEBIO PEDROZA PROVIDED AN EXTRAORDINARY MOMENT OF UNITY

By Ruth Raper

On a crisp June evening in 1985, as 27,000 spectators packed into London's Loftus Road stadium and an estimated 19 million watched on television, a young Irishman from the border town of Clones stepped into the ring to face one of boxing's most formidable champions. What transpired over the next 15 rounds would not only change Barry McGuigan's life forever but would also, if only temporarily, help heal the deep wounds of a nation torn apart by sectarian violence.

To understand the significance of McGuigan's triumph over Eusebio Pedroza, you need to understand the social and political landscape of Northern Ireland in the mid-1980s. The period known as "The Troubles" had been raging for nearly two decades, claiming thousands of lives in a bitter conflict between Unionists/Loyalists (predominantly Protestant) who wished to remain part of the United Kingdom and Nationalists/Republicans (predominantly Catholic) who sought a united Ireland. »

By the 1980s, Northern Ireland had become a land of military checkpoints, bomb scares and divided communities. The province had become synonymous with violence and hatred. Against the backdrop of civil war, few would enter into enemy territory. While the majority in Northern Ireland obeyed these unspoken rules, boxers seemed to be granted diplomatic immunity. You'd often find boxers from both sides of the divide training with each other and even forming close friendships.

Most sports suffered during The Troubles, but boxing found a way to cut through the fear and hatred that consumed Northern Ireland. Team sports such as football (soccer) often seemed to stoke the tribal divisions already ablaze within the country. Derry City FC struggled to complete their season when rival club Linfield FC refused to travel to Derry's home ground due to safety concerns, and Ballymena FC's team bus was torched en route to a match, eventually causing them to withdraw from the Irish Football league. Boxing, however, with its individual nature and cross-community appeal, created rare moments of unity in a fractured society.

Pat McGuigan, Barry's father, was a famous singer who performed in both Protestant and Catholic venues during the early days of The Troubles. This approach influenced young Barry, who would later deliberately choose not to align himself with either Nationalist or Unionist identities. "I never wanted to represent a divided Ireland," McGuigan would later explain, "I wanted to represent all of Ireland."

This stance on neutrality dated back to McGuigan's amateur days. In 1978, Barry was controversially excluded from the Irish National Team for the Under-19 Championships with Michael Holmes, who lost to McGuigan earlier in the year, going in his place. In response, Barry made the strategic decision to box for Northern Ireland.

McGuigan's pragmatic approach to nationality continued into his professional career, when he was granted British citizenship. British citizenship enabled him to compete for British titles, which carried greater prestige and would strengthen his position when challenging for Commonwealth, European and eventually world titles (Irish titles lacked significant international recognition).

Choosing the path of peace over conflict didn't come without a price. After receiving British citizenship, the mocking tagline "Barry the Brit" started appearing on walls throughout West Belfast. McGuigan nearly came to blows with a group of Loyalists while driving through Ulster with his wife and young son. As Barry prepared to drive away, one of the young men shouted "you fucking Taig," a deeply offensive slur for Catholics. When McGuigan stepped out of his car to confront whoever had shouted the insult, no one came forward.

> "I never wanted to represent a divided Ireland. I wanted to represent all of Ireland."

A more sinister threat emerged just before the Pedroza fight when police informed Barry he was on the "red list" on both sides of the border, meaning McGuigan had been targeted for kidnapping by terrorist groups from both Loyalist and Republican factions. As Barry frequently traveled between these divided areas, two pairs of police officers were assigned to protect him around the clock. They also issued him a gun; however, Barry was adamant he would do more damage with his fists. McGuigan explains, "I was boxing for the whole of Ireland and fighting for peace, but the RA (IRA) were no fans of mine because in their minds I was not backing the Republican cause. Nor were the guys of the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force)."

Despite upsetting extremists from both sides of the political divide, by 1985 McGuigan had become one of the most popular figures in Irish and British culture. The charming young fighter with brown ringlet hair and a wispy mustache had earned himself the alias "The Clones Cyclone" because of his overwhelming work rate and all-action style. It was now time for him to challenge for a world title.

Standing in McGuigan's way was Panama's Pedroza, one of the most dominant champions in boxing history. Pedroza had held the WBA featherweight title for an astonishing seven years, successfully defending it 19 times, which remains a division record. Known for his endurance and ring craftiness, Pedroza was the definition of a seasoned champion.

The Panamanian fighter was notorious for his stamina and ability to wear down challengers in the later rounds. He was also known for being a defensive wizard, as Teddy Atlas, who advised McGuigan's team in the lead-up to the fight, explained: "Pedroza had great eyes, a great radar; he was a defensive genius! To catch him, Barry had to throw him off his rhythm. Pedroza was a fighter who was always in charge defensively, so I told Barry to use feints, trickery – throw him off course ... Lie to him!"

At 29, Pedroza was still in his prime and widely expected to handle the younger, less experienced McGuigan, despite the Irishman's impressive 26-1 record coming into the bout. McGuigan, though respected for his power and relentless pressure-fighting style, was facing a significant step up in competition.

John Iacono

McGuigans's father gave a memorable rendition of "Danny Boy."

In the weeks leading up to the fight, Northern Ireland experienced something remarkable: a sense of shared anticipation that transcended political divisions. Both Catholics and Protestants rallied behind McGuigan, a fighter who refused to be defined by sectarian labels.

His manager, Barney Eastwood, a shrewd businessman with connections across the factional divide, had carefully guided McGuigan's career to this moment. British boxing promoter Mickey Duff had secured the fight for McGuigan after lengthy negotiations, recognizing the commercial potential of the charismatic Irishman. The bout would be broadcast live on BBC, ensuring maximum exposure. In Northern Ireland, traditional enemies momentarily set aside their differences. Murals supporting McGuigan appeared in both Loyalist and Republican neighborhoods. In a place where sporting allegiances were typically divided along sectarian lines, McGuigan achieved the near-impossible: uniting people behind a common cause.

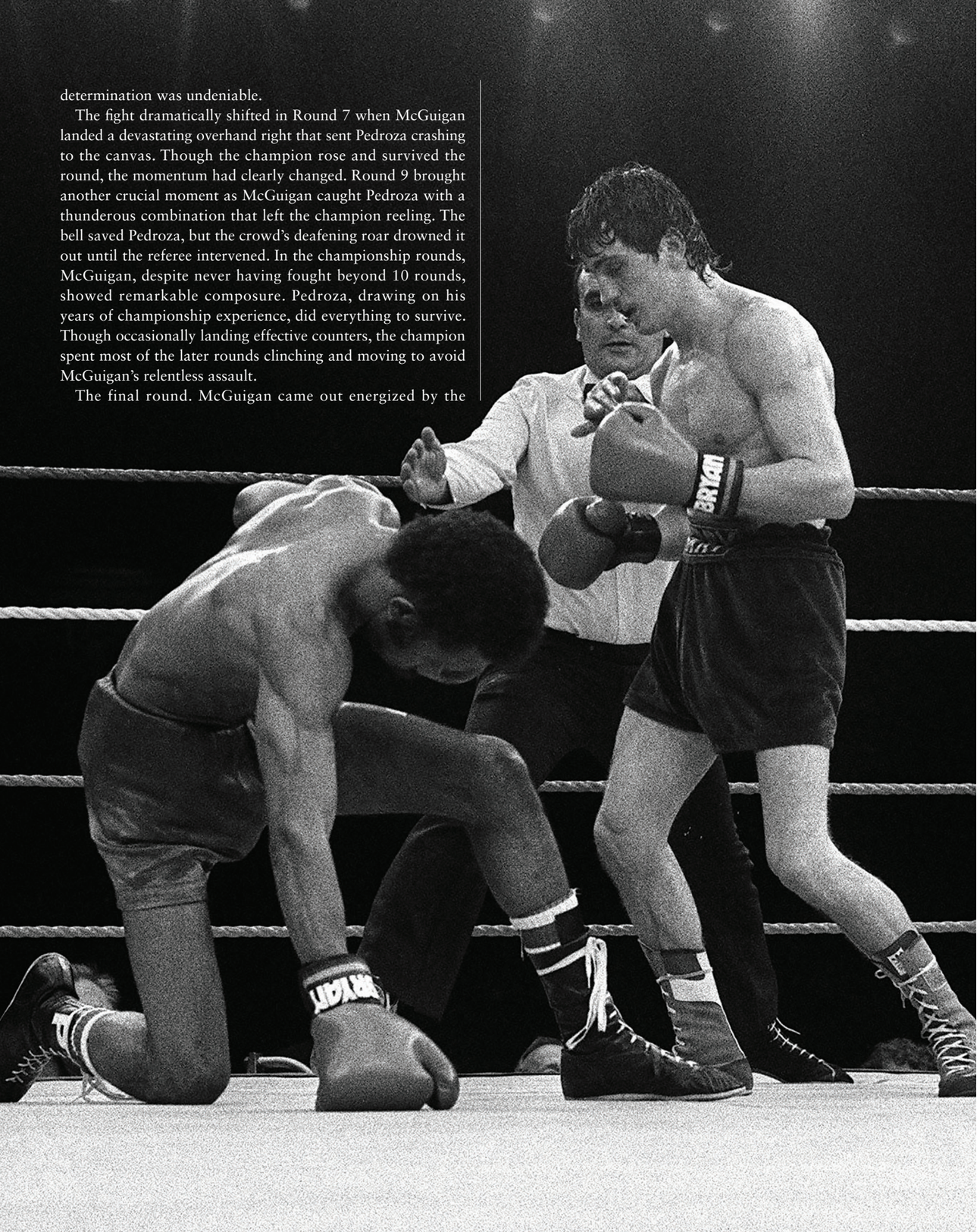
As tickets sold out in record time, McGuigan secluded himself in training camp, preparing for what he called "the fight of my life." To prepare for one of boxing's finest champions, McGuigan recalls, "Barney got me a few sparring partners identical to Pedroza; I worked on getting underneath their jab, rolling my head, forcing them back to the ropes and cutting down the ring, because we'd be fighting in a 21-foot ring. I did lots of sprinting and running. Looking back now, I trained too hard – I overtrained. I would have got more out of myself if I hadn't trained so hard. I would have lasted longer ... I ran those roads every day."

Four hundred ninety-seven miles from Northern Ireland, Loftus Road stadium awaited. The arena crackled with electricity as the capacity crowd held its collective breath, anticipating their hero's entrance. The iconic *Rocky* theme song echoed through the speakers as the Irishman emerged. He shuffled slowly toward the ring, head bowed, gloved hands resting on his trainer's shoulders as they forged the path ahead. As the crowd roared around him, Barry quietly whispered a prayer to himself: "Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here; ever this day, be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide." The crowd surged forward, thousands of hands reaching out, desperate for even the briefest contact with the young contender who might soon make history.

The chant of "Barry! Barry! Barry!" thundered through the stadium as McGuigan finally entered the ring. Barry bounced lightly on his toes in his corner, waiting for the champion to join him. After a few short minutes, Pedroza entered the ring, arms aloft, embodying the essence of a champion. His scarlet robe with silver trim glistened under the bright lights as he acknowledged the crowd with confident poise.

Once both men and their teams assembled in the ring, it was time for the national anthems. McGuigan's father stepped forward and began his soulful rendition of "Danny Boy." Barry would later reflect that "this wasn't the British or Irish anthem; 'Danny Boy' belonged to the whole of Ireland." As the emotional performance concluded, BBC commentator Harry Carpenter exclaimed, "Has there ever been a more emotional night in boxing than this?" The boxers' entourages slowly filed out of the ring, and as Barry's robe was removed, his royal blue velvet shorts trimmed with yellow came into view, emblazoned with the dove of peace – a powerful symbol on this historic night.

In the opening rounds, Pedroza employed his reach advantage and sharp jab to keep the advancing McGuigan at bay. The challenger responded with looping overhand rights and persistent pressure, showing no signs of intimidation against the long-reigning champion. By the middle rounds, a tactical chess match emerged. McGuigan's constant feinting and relentless forward movement began forcing Pedroza to work harder than he was accustomed to. The champion's experience showed in his clinching and defensive maneuvers, but McGuigan's



PA Images

determination was undeniable.

The fight dramatically shifted in Round 7 when McGuigan landed a devastating overhand right that sent Pedroza crashing to the canvas. Though the champion rose and survived the round, the momentum had clearly changed. Round 9 brought another crucial moment as McGuigan caught Pedroza with a thunderous combination that left the champion reeling. The bell saved Pedroza, but the crowd's deafening roar drowned it out until the referee intervened. In the championship rounds, McGuigan, despite never having fought beyond 10 rounds, showed remarkable composure. Pedroza, drawing on his years of championship experience, did everything to survive. Though occasionally landing effective counters, the champion spent most of the later rounds clinching and moving to avoid McGuigan's relentless assault.

The final round. McGuigan came out energized by the crowd's thunderous support. Pedroza did everything possible to reach the bell, moving laterally and clinching whenever McGuigan got close. Barry pushed forward relentlessly, edging ever closer to realizing his dream of becoming world champion.

When the final bell rang after 15 grueling rounds, the outcome seemed clear to observers. McGuigan raised his arms in triumph as his corner lifted him onto their shoulders. The wait for the official decision was merely a formality. When the announcer declared Barry McGuigan the new featherweight champion of the world by unanimous decision (scores of 148-138, 149-139 and 147-140), Loftus Road erupted in celebration. In that moment, millions of Irish people across the sectarian divide celebrated together. In Belfast, Dublin and beyond, people poured into the streets, waving flags and honking car horns. For one night at least, the troubles of Northern Ireland seemed distant.

By defeating Pedroza so comprehensively, McGuigan had established himself as the authentic king of the featherweight division in the eyes of boxing media and historians. The Ring title validated what many already believed: that the young man from Clones was not just a beltholder but a true champion who had defeated the best to claim his crown.

In the days following the fight, McGuigan returned to a hero's welcome in Ireland. His victory parade in Belfast drew crowds from both sides of the community. In Dublin, he was received by the Irish president. For a fighter who had deliberately chosen not to identify with either Nationalist or Unionist traditions, this dual celebration was the ultimate vindication. The Irish Times captured the moment with the headline: "A Nation Unites Behind Its Champion." Television footage from the time shows Protestant and Catholic neighbors celebrating together in streets that had previously been dividing lines. One Belfast resident told a BBC reporter: "Today, we're not Protestant or Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist. We're just Irish, proud of our champion."

Politicians from across the spectrum rushed to associate themselves with McGuigan's success. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent congratulations, as did Irish Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald. Even leaders of paramilitary organizations temporarily softened their rhetoric, recognizing the unifying effect McGuigan had on communities that had been at war for generations. Sportswriter Hugh McIlvanney perhaps best captured McGuigan's social significance when he wrote: "His fists are echoing louder than the bombs."

McGuigan's triumph came at a particularly volatile moment in an already tense time in Northern Ireland's history. Just months earlier, the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been signed, giving the Irish government an advisory role in Northern Ireland for the first time. The agreement had intensified Unionist concerns about a united Ireland and heightened tensions in many communities.

Against this backdrop, McGuigan's universal appeal offered a glimpse of what a nonsectarian Northern Ireland might look like. His deliberate political neutrality – refusing to be claimed by either group made him accessible to everyone. Sports psychologists and sociologists have since studied the "McGuigan Effect," as it became known, the ability of sporting achievement to temporarily transcend deep-seated political and religious divisions.

While McGuigan's victory did not resolve the underlying issues of The Troubles, it demonstrated the power of sport to create shared experiences and common ground. As journalist Eamonn McCann noted: "For a few weeks in the summer of 1985, Barry McGuigan made us forget what divided us and remember what united us. That, perhaps, was a greater achievement than defeating Pedroza."

Nearly four decades after that June night at Loftus Road, McGuigan's victory over Pedroza remains a defining moment in Irish sporting history. Beyond the technical aspects of his performance – the relentless pressure, the devastating body attack, the indomitable will – what resonates most is the social impact of his achievement. In a 2015 BBC documentary marking the 30th anniversary of the fight, McGuigan reflected: "I'm proud of what I accomplished as a boxer, but I'm more proud that for a brief time, I gave people hope. I showed that we had more in common than what separated us."

While The Troubles would continue for years after McGuigan's triumph, eventually giving way to the peace process of the 1990s, the memory of that shared moment of joy remains powerful. It serves as a reminder that even in the darkest times, sport has the capacity to illuminate our common humanity.

Barry McGuigan's defeat of Eusebio Pedroza represents something larger than a boxing match. It stands as testament to the power of an individual to rise above circumstance, to refuse to be defined by the limitations of his environment, and to inspire others to imagine a different future. As Northern Ireland continues its journey toward lasting peace and reconciliation, the legacy of the Clones Cyclone, a Catholic who married a Protestant, who carried no flag but united two traditions, remains as relevant as ever. In 15 rounds on a summer evening in 1985, Barry McGuigan didn't just win a boxing match; he showed a divided nation what unity might feel like. In doing so, he earned his place not just in the annals of boxing history, but in the broader social history of Ireland, a champion whose greatest victory was not over Eusebio Pedroza, but over the divisions of his homeland.

The famous Belfast murals that once portrayed only paramilitary figures and sectarian symbols now include one of McGuigan, arms raised in victory. The caption reads simply: "The People's Champion." RING

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

JARON "BOOTS" ENNIS HAS BEEN CALLED A SUPERSTAR IN THE MAKING AND THE FUTURE POUND-FOR-POUND KING, AND SO FAR HE'S DONE NOTHING TO WEAKEN THOSE PREDICTIONS

BY JOSEPH SANTOLIQUITO

Boston Globe

Quick work was the way to stir up body heat in "The Dungeon," so you either trained hard or you froze. Sparring had to be done in the center of the pockmarked ring canvas, because leaning against the flimsy ropes risked falling through onto the dank concrete floor. Each time the power went out, and it went out frequently, the makeshift gym became a dark, musty void pierced only by small pools of light.

This was Jaron Ennis' boxing incubator.

Built for him and his two older brothers, Derek and Farah, by their father in the basement of a Germantown Philadelphia church, it is where Jaron learned to control space, honing his kinesthetic awareness and reflexes. Fighting under flashlights, a speeding fist would show briefly, then disappear. A head would appear, then vanish. It was boxing by strobe light.

Now largely known to the world by his nickname, "Boots," it has been a while since Jaron has fought in the shadows. Nonetheless, the welterweight champion feels like he is still there, even after dismantling the previously undefeated Eimantas Stanionis in six rounds to capture the Ring championship and unify the IBF and WBA titles back in April at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall.

Against Stanionis, the best opponent he has ever faced, Ennis (34-0, 30 KOs) looked as sharp as he ever has in his burgeoning career. The only one who thought otherwise was Ennis himself.

Days after the win, it still gnawed at the 27-year-old that he did not get a chance to show his "tool bag." He was just about to reach in, as he put it, when Stanionis' trainer, Marvin Somodio, told referee David Fields to end the fight.

"I'm not happy. I'm not happy at all," Ennis told The Ring. "People tell me that was the best I looked. I don't think so. I felt like I was just warming up. I could have done so much more, and for real, I feel robbed. I wanted to show everyone what I am truly capable of doing. I felt like I really didn't do anything. I'm being honest. I was just reaching into my tool bag when they stopped it. Fans may not understand what I'm saying, but everyone in the gym and my team knows.

"I didn't sit down on any punches. Everything was speed. Anytime I did sit down, I missed, so I went back to the speed punches. I was having fun – I'll admit that. But I have a standard I fight up to. I fought Stanionis at about 30, 40% of who I am. Like I always say: The better the opponent, the better I'll be."

The Stanionis win was followed by questions about who would be next.

From Round 1, Boots found the head of Stanionis with ominous regularity.

Matthew Heasley

There are viable unifications with WBC titleholder Mario Barrios (29-2-1, 18 KOs) and WBO beltholder Brian Norman Jr. (27-0, 21 KOs) at Philadelphia's Wells Fargo Center in September, though Uzbekistan's Shakhram Giyasov (17-0, 10 KOs) may stand in the way as the WBA's mandatory challenger.

While those answers remain in the air, we can ponder questions about the champion himself.

WHO IS BOOTS?

It's rather easy: a gym rat. He was born into boxing. To understand Boots, you must first understand his father and trainer, Derek "Bozy" Ennis. He never likes to refer to himself as "a trainer." In the Germantown section of Philadelphia, he had built a reputation as a street slap fighter. No one wanted to test the tall, lean kid with the fast hands. He was so elusive, it was like hitting smoke. And he carried the kind of spirit that once you were around him, you never wanted to leave.

He carries it today.

When you walk down the rickety wooden steps of the Grant Avenue gym in Philadelphia, where Bozy works with his fighters, you are dipped into a cacophony of thumping heavy bags, rhythmic speedbags and the three-minute buzzer that ends each sparring session. Among little kids running around with oversized boxing gloves, teenagers pounding the mitts, heavyweight title contenders trying to reclaim their careers, budding pros and established pros, you'll find Bozy's prized pupil.

Derek Jr. (aka "Pooh") was 16 and Farah was 14 when Boots was born. It was as if Boots had three fathers. Pooh Ennis, who finished his 12-year pro career in 2014 with a 24-5-1 (13 KOs) record, will be the first to admit that he underachieved. Farah, who ended his 11-year pro career with a 22-2 (12 KOs) record, went as far as the NABF super middleweight title.

"You want a word for Boots growing up: spoiled. Spoiled rotten," laughs Pooh, 43. "Anything Boots wanted, he got, whether it was from me, my dad or Farah. When we were teenagers, we trained in dirt in that dungeon. Boots gets the shiny, new stuff by the time he was a teenager.

"My problem was I didn't listen when I was younger or would look for ways to get out of running. None of us are where we are without my dad. He loves boxing, and I mean he truly lives and breathes boxing. He would rather raise a fighter than get him from another trainer. And my dad is hard. [He and I] were not a good mix.

"I hated to train. (laughs) Boots loves it. When Boots isn't training, he's training fighters. He lives here [in the gym], like my dad. I was my own worst enemy. I relied on natural ability. I would lie and say I was going running, go out and sit in front of the train tracks. Boots would try to race the train and try to beat it. (laughs) I would come back and splash water on my face and say I did a few miles. My dad never found out. Boots would never do that."

Bozy's passion centered on his sons doing something in boxing. He had a brief pro career of his own, compiling a record of 4-2 (3 KOs) between 1977-84, and immersed himself in the sport at the PAL Center at Seymour and Green Streets in Philadelphia. When his sons were born, he began shaping and molding them into boxers. Bozy branched out. He began taking in anyone who was willing to work – and listen.

He would work 16-hour days between construction and factory work, walking around with his eyes at half-mast. Once he entered the gym in the evening, he woke up.

So it's no wonder that over the last decade, the longest Boots has gone

without being in the gym is five days.

"I'm not the same person; I get surly when I'm away from the gym for long," Boots admits. "I think that comes from loving it. Boxing is all I know. My inspirations were Pooh and Farah and guys like Roy Jones, Sugar Ray Leonard, Floyd Mayweather. No one today. Those guys did it right. I know it was a different time, but they did it right. No one was handed anything. I didn't want to win the IBF title the way I did [when Terence Crawford vacated]. I wanted to earn it. I beat [Stanionis] for the [Ring/WBA] title. I can say I finally earned it. I have nothing to prove at this point. I don't care. All that matters is making my family and my team proud.

"I train every day like I'm training for a title. Two days after [Stanionis], where was I? I was shadowboxing 10, 12 rounds. If you want to call it an addiction, well, then it's an addiction … a good addiction. The gym is a second home to me. It always will be. If I'm not training, I'm training other fighters. I don't care who is next. I'm not worried about any of these other guys. These guys are supposed to be monsters – world-beaters. They have something to prove. I don't. I know how good I am."

WHAT MAKES BOOTS GOOD?

"Be like water making its way through cracks. Do not be assertive, but adjust to the object, and you shall find a way around or through it. If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves." – Bruce Lee.

Or, as Sergio Mora put it ringside during his DAZN broadcast of the Ennis-Stanionis fight, Boots is "like Neo from The Matrix in there."

Boots has no definitive style. Against Stanionis, he fought orthodox and as a southpaw. He boxed but also engaged with the now-former WBA titlist. He can take a punch, though he gets hit a little more than some might like. He has explosive hand speed. He is 5-foot-10 with a 74-inch reach – rangy for a welterweight – possesses superior athleticism, a strong work ethic and an exceptionally high ring IQ. He is staunchly determined – when challenged by what he views as a worthy opponent – and creative. He can work angles and set traps for opponents. He has an array of punches he can use, from his piston-like jab to the uppercut body shots with which he was nailing Stanionis.

Bozy and his youngest son are so invested in Boots' ability and style that they never – that's never – watch film of an opponent. Why should they, asks Bozy. "No one is going to beat Boots at his best. And he's always at his best."

The uppercut continually pierced the guard and caused significant damage.

"Boots is just more athletic than everybody, and I'm talking about everyone in boxing, even someone like Naoya Inoue, because Boots is more fluid," said Hall of Famer and respected ESPN ringside analyst Tim Bradley. "He is like a boxing Kobe Bryant or Michael Jordan because of his combination of superior athleticism and his skills. Athleticism comes with a curse, though. Like Roy Jones Jr., you sometimes become dependent on your athleticism because you are so much better than everyone else. You can get away with mistakes, and eventually they will catch up with you. When you are that good, you are able to break a lot of rules."

Boots breaks rules. He crosses his feet. He drops his hands. He does rely on his athleticism to slip and elude punches. He sometimes switches right to left as he punches, which can be dangerous in front of a gifted, quick-handed counterpuncher who can catch him squared up. Ennis is willing to take chances against inferior opponents and is willing to get hit cleanly with shots, particularly left hooks.

Matthew Heasley

With years of built-up muscle memory, Boots might be set in his ways.

"There is no reason for Boots to give up his defense for his offense. He's too good to take those risks, yet he does," Bradley said. "Boots is a tremendous fighter, but for him to rise to a higher level, he needs to return to the fundamentals. My worry with him is: Can he box for 12 rounds against a tough, big boxer-puncher type and come out unscathed? At welterweight, Boots I don't think dominates everyone. Brian Norman has power in both hands, and he does have a left hook. The fight everyone should want to see is Boots against a big left hook guy like Ryan Garcia. That's the guy I want to see him face. Ryan, boxing-wise, does not have the skills to stay with Boots. What is special about Ryan, under the guidance of Derrick James, is he is using his right hand. If Ryan can continue to develop that, he can be special.

"Boots leaves his lead hand down often when he's in the southpaw stance. Ryan may be able to get him with the left hook, and he has speed to go along with that, too. Skill-wise, Boots can outbox Ryan, but can he do it without getting caught? Brian Norman has a left hook. Can Boots outbox him without getting caught for 12 rounds? Over the years, he has gotten away with things that have created bad habits. Boots is a special fighter, with special attributes, and a special work ethic, and his high boxing IQ can set anyone up from any side. Boots and his father may say that they don't have a game plan, but they had a game plan for Stanionis."

That plan was to jab Stanionis, move laterally and set traps for uppercuts, and if Stanionis got too close, tie him up. Each time Stanionis did get close, Ennis made him pay with uppercuts as the Lithuanian was repositioning.

"It was easy work for Boots, which I saw coming," Bradley said. "I respect Boots. I respect his father. I respect his game. He is a tremendous talent. But after one great performance … I get it, he looked special, but he makes mistakes – correctable mistakes, things he needs to do better going forward."

HOW FAR CAN BOOTS GO?

Right now, Ennis is still able to make 147 easily, he says. He was on weight the week of the Stanionis fight. He does want to fight one more time this year, the aim being September, possibly to capitalize on the media attention that will come with the Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles' season opener.

Stephen Espinoza, the former president of Showtime Sports, gave Boots his first large platform on Showtime Championship Boxing. He saw the signs in Ennis six years ago.

"I would like to say I'm some genius with the gift of foresight, but the kid's talent was pretty clear if you looked close enough," Espinoza said. "He has the physical tools, the athleticism, the reflexes, the natural power and a wealth of experience with his dad and his brothers having literally grown up in the sport. You put all of that together and it's as sure a bet [as any] in my boxing career. I think what held Boots back is that he is not a self-promoter. He comes from a humble family. He's humble. Boots works hard in the gym, he doesn't talk trash, and that kind of approach is not always rewarded.

"The only person who can beat Boots is Boots. The only question right now is how big can Boots be. It's almost heresy to say this: Boots can be a peak Roy Jones, when he was the best in the world. What vaulted Roy into mainstream superstardom was he had a network's marketing machine behind him. That's the one thing Boots doesn't quite have yet, with due respect to everyone over on his current platform. He is not being marketed as much as his skills and his abilities demand. That's the only missing piece. Boots is doing everything asked of him and more. He just needs a bigger marketing platform to launch him into stardom."

Mora sees Ennis less as the next Jones than the next incarnation of the 37-year-old Terence "Bud" Crawford. If Crawford beats Canelo Alvarez in September, will we ever see the young lion test himself against the old lion?

Ennis is tired of waiting for Crawford. He is tired of waiting for his "name" opponent. He has three belts. The way he sees it, everyone must come to him now that he holds the Ring Magazine 147-pound championship.

"That Ring belt is huge for me. It's historic. It recognizes the best," Boots said. "I always wanted the Ring belt. Roy had it. Floyd had it. Now I have it. I'm the best in the world. I'm No. 1 pound-for-pound. I know the media may look at me as 11 or 12. I'm staying at 147, and I'll move up naturally to 168, cleaning out every division as I go. That's my goal. And I'm not going to dance for everyone and put on a show [outside the ring] to do it.

"It's not me. I'm not going to pretend to be someone else. I'll let my talent do the talking. I see these guys talking and acting. I'm not putting on that mask. That's not me. Why should I bash Stanionis? The guy came half around the world to fight me. His wife was having their first kid. To me, that's admirable. Anyone who gets in the ring with me, I respect. They are taking a chance with their lives like I am. This is a serious game. It's why I don't act like a clown. It's why I never get caught up in that social media shit. I love boxing. These guys fighting today fight for money. I fight because I love it.

"Let's see who the winner is in the end." RING

Joseph Santoliquito is an award-winning sportswriter who has been working for Ring Magazine/RingTV.com since October 1997 and is the president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. Follow him on X @JSantoliquito.

Naoki Fukuda

UNINTENDED GREATNESS

BOXING WAS NEVER THE DREAM THAT **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WAS CHASING, BUT THE TWO-DIVISION TITLEHOLDER QUICKLY DISCOVERED HIS INNER CHAMPION AND IS NOW ONE OF THE SPORT'S MOST TALENTED FIGHTERS

By Daisuke Sugiura

Since turning professional in August 2014, diminutive Japanese warrior Kenshiro Teraji has made good on his ring moniker, "The Amazing Boy." This 33-year-old boxing juggernaut annexed world titles in two weight classes, unified in both, and won the Ring Magazine championship at 108 pounds. He is currently the WBA and WBC flyweight titleholder.

In the ring, Teraji has done it all. He was dropped early in his career by an undefeated Filipino named Rolly Sumalpong and got up to win. After suffering his only professional setback to the excellent Masamichi Yabuki in 2021, he gained revenge via knockout in a direct rematch the following year. And it was his come-from-behind, 12th-round stoppage of compatriot Seigo Yuri Akui in a flyweight unification bout on March 13 that took Teraji's reputation to new heights and vaulted him into the pound-for-pound ratings.

(Above) Teraji blasts compatriot and former sparring partner Seigo Yuri Akui in their classic unification bout.

But despite everything that The Amazing Boy has accomplished in his Hall of Fame-worthy career, his greatest challenges could lie ahead of him. The likes of fellow pound-for-pounder Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez,

Naoki Fukuda

WBA 115-pound titleholder Fernando Martinez and former champ Kazuto Ioka could all be in the mix for the great Teraji, who is now firmly established as one of the best fighters in the world and is finally getting the recognition his rich talents deserve.

The following Q&A was conducted shortly after Teraji's epic triumph over Akui.

THE RING: Your latest KO win against Seigo Yuri Akui was well-received in the U.S. as well as Japan. How do you look back on it?
KENSHIRO TERAJI: It was a good fight. I didn't want to have a back-and-forth fierce battle, and I wanted to win a little easier, but it was exciting, and I think the fans were happy that I was able to knock him out in the final round. It was a dramatic come-from-behind KO, too, so I'm glad I won.

THE RING: I think it's quite rare for a unification fight to be decided by knockout in the final round. Did you have a feeling that you were behind until the 12th?
KT: I don't really calculate points. My corner didn't tell me to go for the kill in the final round, but I was determined to win the 12th. I had the feeling that I needed the last one.

THE RING: You were high on Akui even before the fight, but what did you think was his strength when you actually fought him?
KT: I was hit with his jabs from the beginning, and he was good at keeping his distance. His jabs were fast. As the [WBA flyweight titleholder], he had power. His punches might not have been so powerful that they were dangerous, but he still had decent power.

THE RING: In recent fights, you actually have been attacking more aggressively than before, it seems like. Do you think there's an underlying desire to get the fans excited?
KT: Maybe. Now that I'm in charge of the main event, yes, I want to win by KO. Lately, people have started to say that my fights are exciting and fun, and I think that there's a part of me that's unconsciously becoming that way.

THE RING: You are an all-rounder who can do a lot of things in the ring, but what part are you most confident in?
KT: Stamina. I'm able to throw a lot of punches. It's partly due to the amount of training I do, but I was also good at running long distances, so I think I was born with it. I'm confident that I don't lose in terms of stamina, therefore I can fight at such a fast pace.

THE RING: Your stamina was incredible in the Akui fight.
KT: My stamina didn't run out until the end. I wasn't out of breath from the beginning, and I also tried to stay focused. I often lose concentration and get hit with a lot of punches, which can make me look bad, but this time I was conscious of that and I don't think that happened.

THE RING: Do you think your improved stamina is due to moving up to the flyweight division?
KT: Indeed. I think it's completely different from when I was in the junior flyweight division. The weight cut is much less strict now, so I can keep eating and moving until the end [of camp] and adjust accordingly. That's why I feel like my movements are different in the fight too.

THE RING: Do you feel like you're a better fighter now than you were at 108 pounds?
KT: Yes, I do. My legs feel different in the fights.

THE RING: You told me before that you were following instructions as if you were being controlled by your trainer Kenta Kato. Is that still the case?
KT: That hasn't changed, but I think it would be better if I'm able to think for myself too. I can do what I'm told to do, but it's not ideal if I don't know how to fight until I get back to the corner. I need to be able to feel the flow of the fight myself and be able to adapt. That's something I'm working on.

THE RING: Have you had success?
KT : Yes, and there's no doubt that's progress. However, I still don't have the courage to drastically change my fighting style during the round. In the Akui fight, I was thinking about how to move, what to do, whether I should keep attacking like I had, and then Kato said, "Let's move your feet a little bit for now." So I decided to use my legs, and from there I was able to win some rounds.

THE RING: When were you told that?
KT: Around the seventh or eighth round. I think I started to win rounds one after another from there. I believe that was the turning point of the fight. I think my corner and I agreed there on how to fight.

THE RING: I can sense that you have complete trust in Kato.
KT: For sure. I believe that if I do as Kato suggests, I always win. What he says is correct, accurate, and he's knowledgeable too, so I trust him.

THE RING: In recognition of your victory over Akui and your outstanding career thus far, you have been ranked in the top 10 of Ring Magazine's pound-for-pound rankings.
KT: Yes, I'm so happy!

THE RING: I don't think you were particularly interested in pound-for-pound up until now. However, you posted about your joy on your X account and seem genuinely happy.
KT: I'm really happy and I feel I want to raise my rank even higher. I've started to think about aiming for a higher level. My name is getting out there on a global scale, and I think good fighters are starting to pay attention to me, so I'm happy in that respect. It also increases the chances of me having a big fight.

THE RING: I would like to hear about your future plans, then. It seems that you are not too concerned about becoming the undisputed champion at 112 pounds. Is it because you have already beaten IBF titleholder Masamichi Yabuki and WBO titleholder Anthony Olascuaga by knockout?
KT: That's right. I've already beaten them. I don't know how excited the people around me would be either. I'd rather fight someone at 115 pounds, to be honest.

THE RING: I have seen reports that it may be a while before you move up to junior bantamweight. If that's the case, is there a possibility that you will defend your titles or even have a unification fight?
KT: The 115-pound titleholders all have their own schedules, so it would be difficult for me to challenge them immediately. I think there is a possibility of a title defense. The best thing would be for the other two champions in the flyweight division, Yabuki and Olascuaga, to have a unification fight. It would be impossible for me to face both, because there would be mandatory title defenses too. If it were the undisputed fight between two champions who hold two titles, I would definitely take it.

Teraji is a popular main event fighter in Japan but hasn't yet fought in the U.S.

THE RING: You've said that you want to fight to get another belt, but will your excitement for the defense depend on your opponent?
KT: Well, I mean, I think I'll be motivated, and I'll work hard no matter who I face, because I always want to win, but I feel like I can work harder as a challenger. I prefer being called an underdog, and I can give 120%. One of the reasons I want to move up a weight class is because I want to see what kind of power I can show when the odds are against me.

THE RING: You named Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez as the fighter you want to fight at 115.
KT: I would like to fight him. He is the fighter I want to fight the most right now. I think he is the best [in the junior bantamweight division]. I have watched a few of his fights and I can learn from him.

THE RING: What exactly can you learn?
KT: He probably has pretty good power, and his overall skill level is high, but he's really good at lateral movement. He often hits and then moves sideways, so his punches will come from places you can't see, and since he doesn't move back, he can hit right away. I tend to step back and then hit, so I can learn from him. Yes, I would love to fight him.

In a close call, Teraji claimed a majority decision over Carlos Canizales.

THE RING: If you face Kazuto Ioka, it will be a very attractive fight too, especially among Japanese fans.
KT: It's certainly appealing. First, Ioka needs to beat Fernando Martinez. Martinez is strong, but Ioka is good, and I have the impression that he always gets better in a rematch, so it's interesting. Ioka is really good at throwing different punches, doesn't get hit very often, and I think he's a guy respected by boxing enthusiasts. He's originally from the west side of Japan, where I am from too, so I used to watch his fights a lot.

THE RING: According to Ring Magazine Editor-in-Chief Douglass Fischer, Premier Boxing Champions, which has ties to Martinez, is interested in staging a bout between Martinez and you, possibly on a Riyadh Season card.
KT: Wow! Really? It must be amazing to be a pound-for-pound top 10 fighter. That's why my name is being mentioned, right? I've seen Martinez's highlights, and he is powerful. He seems to have pretty good stamina too.

THE RING: If you are facing big-name opponents such as Bam Rodriguez, Martinez or Juan Francisco Estrada, talk of the fight taking place in the United States is likely to emerge.
KT: I don't mind if it's America. I don't have any particular preference. But there's also the question of which one offers bigger money. (laughs) For the lower weight classes, it might be better-paid in Japan.

THE RING: Naoya Inoue has just returned to the U.S. for his first fight in a long time, but what do you think of Inoue? How do you feel about having a fighter like him in your generation?
KT: He's a special fighter. It's great to have a generational talent like him in this era, because he's livening up the Japanese boxing world. We're in different weight classes, and I don't feel like we're rivals or anything like that. I just think he's a great fighter. It's not that I'm aiming to be him, but I think there's a huge difference in ability between him and me.

THE RING: When I talk to you, I get the feeling that you don't have any special attachment to boxing, though not in a bad way. Looking back on your career a little bit, how did you start boxing?
KT: When I was looking for a high school to attend, I was told by one of them that I could be accepted if I did boxing, so I decided to give it a try. My childhood goal was becoming a boat racer, and I heard that if I would get in the top five in pro rankings, I would receive a special recommendation to be a racer. I thought I could probably be ranked in the top five in Japan, so that's when I decided to become a pro boxer. My cousin was a boat racer, and I knew the prize money is good. Boat racers have long lifespans, and the fact that they can compete even after the age of 50 seemed appealing. So I wasn't seriously aiming to become a world champion of boxing. Although I trained hard, I didn't really like boxing. I only did boxing as a job to become a boat racer.

Naoki Fukuda

THE RING: When did boxing become fun?
KT: As I continued to defend my world title, I gradually started to realize it was actually so much fun. I started training with Kato in Tokyo, and thanks to his guidance, my boxing knowledge increased rapidly, and along the way I started to realize how much fun it was. Boxing is so deep. There are still things I don't know, and I'm starting to enjoy discovering new things, such as technical things and how to use my body. I like boxing more now than I used to.

THE RING: You became a world champion in 2017 even though you didn't really like boxing yet, so how did you feel when you won the title for the first time?
KT: I knew I could become a world champion, so I was like, "Yay!" (laughs) I didn't have that much passion for boxing yet. However, at that time, I pretty much decided that I would continue to pursue my boxing career. After becoming the world champion, I decided it was OK to give up boat racing. Rather than just liking it, I felt that boxing is suitable for me.

THE RING: You are always calm, either inside or outside of the ring, but do you ever get angry?
KT: I don't get angry too often. I don't want to waste my energy being mad. If someone makes me angry, I distance myself from that person and do something different. I don't get attached to people.

THE RING: Have you ever gotten a little too hyped up in a fight, like Inoue did against Luis Nery?
KT: It happened probably only once; I was nervous before the rematch against Yabuki. There was a lot of pressure that if I lost, my career would have been basically over, so I was a little nervous.

THE RING: Is the Yabuki rematch your best fight so far?
KT: Yes, I was so happy, probably the happiest winning the fight. I was able to make some good adjustments against my opponent, and I think my fighting style changed there. It was a good turning point.

THE RING: Do you usually watch a lot of boxing?
KT: No, I don't. I just go to the venue when my stablemates have a fight and watch it. Other than that, I only attend big events like Inoue vs. Nery. I don't buy tickets myself. Boxing tickets are expensive. (laughs)

THE RING: Who was your favorite fighter growing up?
KT: I didn't have any. I'm probably not interested in other people. (laughs)

THE RING: Your father was a former Japanese middleweight and OPBF light heavyweight champion. Have you ever watched his fights?
KT: I've never seen my father fight live. I watched the video for the first time when I was in college. The coach of my college boxing team happened to have a video of it, and he showed it to me. It was the only fight he lost. Before the fight, my father was staring at his opponent like a madman and that was shocking to me. (laughs)

THE RING: Do you often talk about boxing with your father?
KT: Our relationship is pretty good, but my father hasn't said anything about my boxing career. We never really talk about boxing at home, and I don't think there was much advice given from him after the fights either. Currently, I am using Misako Gym in Tokyo as my training location, so he doesn't interfere in my preparation. He sometimes comes to watch my sparring but just goes home right after watching it. My father's not exactly a "boxing father." He's easygoing.

THE RING: About a year ago, you said you had about two more years to continue boxing. How do you feel now?
KT: I feel like I can still go on for another two years. I have the drive to do it. But a year from now I might be saying "two more years" again, or it might end in one more year, so I don't know. Anyway, I'd like to leave boxing cleanly. I don't want to do it too long. The life is longer after retirement, and I don't want to hurt my body. There are a lot of fighters who keep fighting past their prime, but personally I don't want that to happen to me. I want people around me to tell me when I start to decline. I told my strength coach to let me know when I've passed my peak.

THE RING: You've mentioned your desire to move up to the junior bantamweight division, but is there any chance you'll move up to the bantamweight division?
KT: I don't think so. 118 pounds is different. It's not so much the size, but the frame is different. I get pushed around physically, so I feel like there's a wall there. It might be different if I think about it after I move up to 115 pounds, but since I fought at junior flyweight, I've always thought that there was a wall at the bantamweight. For now, I think 115 is my last weight class.

THE RING: What are your retirement plans?
KT: I have no idea. I don't think I'm good at teaching, so I won't be able to be a trainer. It's easier to do it myself than to teach it. Well, I think I'll take it easy for about a year. I hope I'll eventually find something I want to do. I don't have to force myself to find what I want to do, right? (laughs) RING

FUNDAMENTALS

Essential tools for the boxing deep dive

By Lee Groves

GREB

LOST FIGHT:

Harry Greb UD 15
Gene Tunney I

» May 23, 1922,

Madison Square Garden, New York

This may be the crown jewel of "lost classics" because (1) no footage of Greb in official action has surfaced, (2) it may have been the greatest single win of Greb's 302-fight career, (3) it was the only loss of "The Fighting Marine's" 67-fight record – a loss Tunney would avenge several times over – and (4) the fight showcased Greb's ability to defeat men larger than himself as well as the gargantuan fighting heart that Tunney's scholarly persona obscured. This fight for the American light heavyweight title remains memorable more than a century later not because it featured savage two-way action, but because it stretched the limits of one man's ability to dish out punishment and the other man's capacity to keep fighting through severe adversity.

For the 174½-pound Tunney, that adversity began seconds into the fight when the 162¼-pound Greb broke Tunney's nose in two places. Later in the round, Greb opened a four-inch gash over Tunney's left eyebrow that had originally been caused in sparring, and that bleeding was worsened because an artery had been severed. Tunney's right eye was cut in the third, and the gore was such that referee Billy "Kid" McPartland frequently stopped the action to towel off Tunney's face. In all, six towels were used, and the sight of Tunney was so grim that even Greb, known for his animalistic remorselessness, asked McPartland to stop the fight. Tunney's reported reply: "For God's sake, don't stop it!"

Though blinded and suffering torturous pain, Tunney managed to last the entire 15 rounds, but only after spilling an estimated two quarts of crimson. After being declared the loser, Tunney had to be carried back to his dressing room. By going out on his shield, all questions about Tunney's competitive spirit were forever extinguished, and by beating Tunney, Greb bolstered his case for being the best pound-for-pound fighter of all time.

TUNNEY

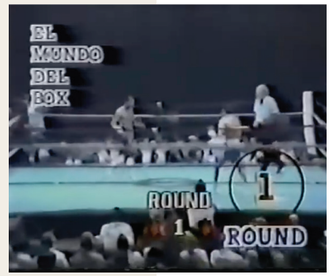
Greb: Bettmann; Tunney: FBG

FORGOTTEN CLASSIC:

Antonio Avelar
TKO 8 Wilfredo Vazquez

» May 30, 1986, Tamiami Fairgrounds Auditorium, Miami

This is a fight to be remembered because of the multiple storylines: It was Mexico (Avelar) versus Puerto Rico (Vazquez). It was a former flyweight champion (Avelar) versus a future three-division titleholder (Vazquez). And both men were on the comeback trail: Avelar was coming off a fourth-round TKO loss against 18-8 journeyman Arturo Mujica two and a half months earlier, while Vazquez was fighting for the second time since his failed first world title challenge against then-WBC bantamweight king Miguel Lora, who outpointed him after they had traded knockdowns. Vazquez was hoping to use Avelar as a stepping stone toward a potential rematch against Lora.



The fight followed the anticipated script in the first four rounds as the younger Vazquez earned a slight edge in their exchanges of boulder-like power shots. It earned classic status in the fifth, one of the greatest single rounds this observer has seen in his 51 years of fandom. Avelar floored Vazquez with a scorching hook just eight seconds in, and Vazquez returned the favor shortly before the one-minute mark with a lead right that resulted in a belly flop into the ropes. Vazquez unleashed an all-out assault over the next 50 seconds, connecting with flush one-twos that repeatedly snapped Avelar's head back, but, with 50 seconds left, Avelar reversed positions with Vazquez and nailed him with vicious hook-cross combos. In the final 35 seconds, they launched *simultaneous* left-rights, with Vazquez's connecting forcefully and Avelar's mostly missing. Meanwhile, the crowd, astonished at the brutality, yelled at full volume and gave the fighters a rousing ovation at round's end.

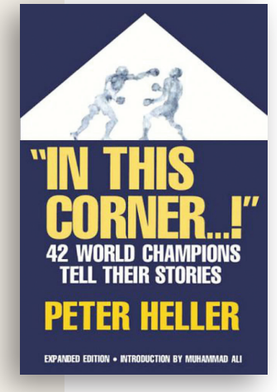
The sixth and seventh were merely excellent, and in the eighth, Avelar floored Vazquez with the straightest right hand he threw all night. Vazquez arose at four, but, seeing the vacant look in the Puerto Rican's eyes, referee Harry Brennan stopped the fight.

MUST-READ:

"In This Corner...!" 42 World Champions Tell Their Stories

» By Peter Heller (Simon & Schuster, 1973)

Heller, just 21 when he got the idea to write the book, interviewed champions and contenders whose careers ranged from the 1910s (Willie Ritchie, Gunboat Smith, Pete Herman and Jack Dempsey) through the 1960s (Paul Pender, Emile Griffith, Willie Pastrano, Joey Giardello and Jose Torres) with plenty of legends in-between (Mickey Walker, Tommy Loughran, Joe Louis, Henry Armstrong, Billy Conn, Willie Pep, Sugar Ray Robinson, Jake LaMotta, Sandy Saddler, Archie Moore, Carmen Basilio, etc.). But as special as this idea was, Heller, inspired by Lawrence Ritter's *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball*, chose not to summarize their remarks in his own prose but to print the fighters' remarks verbatim.



"I said to myself, 'Nobody's ever done this kind of a book, interviewing guys and letting them speak in the first person, with boxers,'" Heller said on the February 19, 2022, episode of *In This Corner: The Podcast*, which can be seen on TrillerTV.com. "I just looked at the old guys that I thought were still around and I realized they were getting on in years, and I said, 'Somebody had better get out there and interview these guys before they're gone.'"

Rocky Marciano's sudden death in a plane crash served as the catalyst to press forward, and despite having no publisher or having never written a book, Heller used his free time to track down the fighters, transcribe their words and convince Simon & Schuster to publish the final product. It's a book that will never lose its freshness, and for those who love the sport's rich history and its never-ending supply of characters, this is a must-get. RING

Lee Groves is the winner of 22 writing awards from the BWAA and has been an elector for the International Boxing Hall of Fame since 2001. He is a panelist on In This Corner: The Podcast *on YouTube and is the author of* Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics. *Email him at l.groves@frontier.com or send him a message via Facebook or X (@leegrovesboxing).*

FIGHT DOCTOR

WHEN TO STEP AWAY

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

Tim Bradley (right) and Ruslan Provodnikov brutalized one another.

Every fighter understands the risks they face in sparring and during a bout, but it's not always easy to know when it is the right time to retire. Famed HBO commentator Larry Merchant once told me boxers should retire once the public no longer wants to see them fight. From a physician's perspective, we know the answer. Although a license to compete is a privilege and not a right, it's often a Herculean effort to prove that a fighter should retire, as medical tests typically won't demonstrate the changes until it is too late.

Former world titleholder and 2023 International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee Tim Bradley says, "We know when we aren't at our best, but many can't [retire], because they are not financially set. We know our bodies. I knew when I was a little less of myself." Bradley officially retired in 2017.

"Fighters are adrenaline junkies," he told me. "The hardest thing in retiring was not having to strive towards a goal. Since I was 10 years old, there was something to strive upon. I had a hard time [saying no to] that money, but I felt myself deteriorating toward the back end of my career, and I was worried I was not going to have a future."

Bradley's only two losses out of 36 bouts were against Manny Pacquiao, whom he fought three times. Watching the Filipino legend perform 15 months after the conclusion of their trilogy was the turning point: "I was commentating the 2017 Manny Pacquiao-Jeff Horn bout," said Bradley. "Now I saw an old lion (Pacquiao) with a ton of scars battling a young buck. I didn't want to be that guy." About three weeks later, Bradley announced his intent to retire.

He admits he should have walked away after his brutal 12-round slugfest with Ruslan Provodnikov in The Ring's 2013 Fight of the Year. He even went to concussion specialists who showed him changes in his brain scan that were due to trauma. They told Bradley to retire, but he fought six more times before hanging up his gloves.

Every fighter should have a partner like Monica Bradley. Each time before Tim fought, he would warn his wife, who was also his manager, in the dressing room that when he came back, he might not be the same. "I didn't want to go to the hospital after every fight. She couldn't make the decision [to retire] for me, but she put things in perspective. She managed our finances and let me know that we were financially fine." After finally making the tough decision to leave the ring, Bradley moved on to a great future on the other side of the ropes calling fights for Top Rank events on ESPN.

Christy Martin, former WBC titleholder and now president of Christy Martin Promotions, fought 59 times from 1989-2012. "I had to retire because I had a stroke, but I still fought Mia St. John in [2012] and lost!" said Martin. "It was tough that I made such a poor decision, and losing to a fighter like Mia hurt my career.

"I sparred guys through much of my career; I was hit a lot. I definitely had concussions. After I fought Laila Ali, many recommended that I go to the hospital, but my ex-husband said no, as he was afraid I would never be allowed to fight again. Now when I get tired, my speech slows down." She admits she doesn't know what the future will hold regarding the punishment she sustained and believes fighters should retire when it becomes a job. "Then you need to not do it anymore. I was chasing money, but you have to not let money be your reason [to continue]."

At age 32, Seniesa Estrada retired in October 2024 at the peak of her career, the undisputed 105-pound champion with a record of 26-0. "I started boxing at age 8 and had 104 amateur fights. My long-term goal was always to turn pro, but I had no idea that the business side of women's boxing was so tough."

She developed anxiety and depression and believes that 99% of boxing can be "mental": "My hand and back injuries that I was dealing with made it tough to compete at that level. I pushed through not being 100%." Although Estrada never complained about brain-injury symptoms like Bradley and Martin and was making the most money of her career, she knew it was the right time. "God gave me a sign that this is the right decision. That depression is still inside me, but I am happy and don't regret my decision." She now works with women fighters, is studying acting and hopes to do some commentating.

Which boxers develop cognitive decline more than the average person? Can it be prevented by limiting risk factors?

The end results hinge upon genetics, anatomy, training history, the age they started sparring and competing, ability to avoid countless punches, number of rounds fought, skill level and past concussions, along with lifestyle circumstances.

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) seems to have become part of our lexicon through football, but we always knew boxers were at risk, even when we called it "punch-drunk syndrome." It often begins much before retirement but worsens through the years. No one completely understands why the damage continues once the trauma stops. Many believe it is because it takes years for the brain cells to die, and the risk factors may play more of a role.

Experts continue to search for answers as to why some fighters are minimally affected while others develop full-blown CTE. Commissions and ringside physicians would like to think they can direct a fighter to retire sufficiently early before memory loss and psychiatric symptoms exist. It's almost always too late.

CTE symptoms include issues with balance and coordination, memory loss, confusion, slurred/garbled speech, personality changes, attention deficits and erratic behavior that can include aggression, depression or even suicidal tendencies.

On autopsy, athletes with CTE have an abnormal brain protein called "tau," which leads to impaired communication between the brain nerve cells. It is the hope of researchers that the diagnosis can be made very early by using MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), which looks at brain structure, or PET (positron emission tomography) to evaluate brain metabolism.

Dr. Charles Bernick, senior director of cognitive disorders at the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health in Las Vegas, has been the lead investigator and champion of the Professional Fighters Brain Health Study to examine the cumulative effects of repetitive concussions and subconcussive impacts. Bernick notes: "Starting in 2011, we have evaluated approximately 900 participants with a retention of about 300."

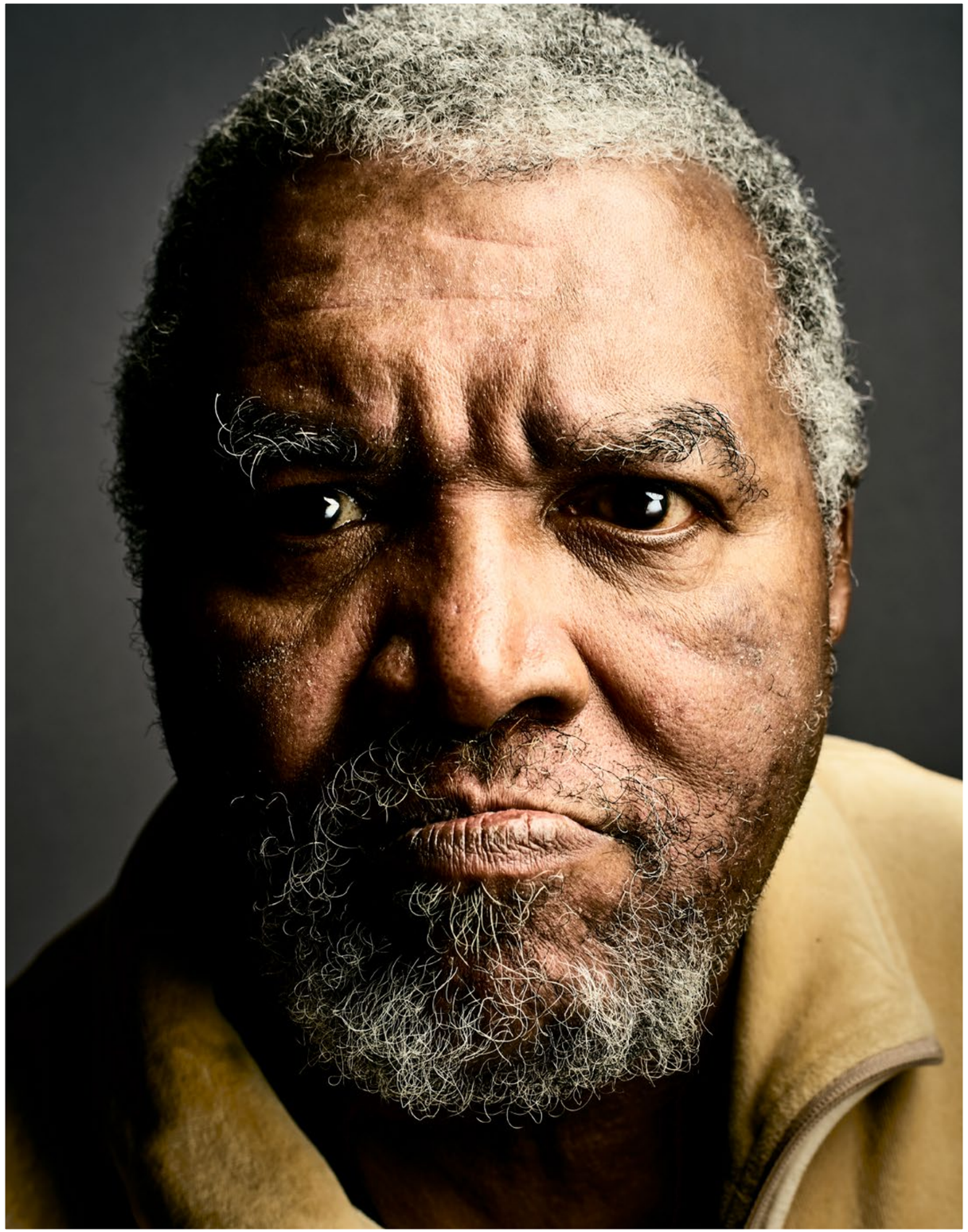
In active fighters, most of the changes seen relate to volume of the deeper portions of the brain like the thalamus, which is like a relay station or "hub" sending out sensory information. In retired fighters, the changes are more visible in the hippocampus, the memory center. "Fighters undergo yearly MRI scanning, cognitive testing and blood testing," says Bernick. "The blood testing is to identify levels of tau and another marker, NfL (neurofilament light chain), that could be the cause of the brain changes and symptoms." He hopes the identification of these biomarkers can determine prognosis and reduce risk.

Not every boxer with the same longstanding fight history and exposure progresses in the same way or even develops dementia. Genetic factors, including the presence of the gene APOE4, which has been linked to Alzheimer's disease, are often mentioned. The APOE4-positive boxers seem to have more brain changes. Social determinants such as where they grew up and comorbidities like excessive alcohol and/or drug use, depression, stress and poor sleep can also make a difference. A Mediterranean diet is recommended, emphasizing less processed foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes (like beans/lentils), healthy fats like olive oil, limiting red meats and sweets, moderate eggs and dairy and limiting alcohol. We have yet to see the influence of performance-enhancing drug use.

Bernick's study looked at whether it was better to get hit a lot or with less force, but there wasn't a significant difference. "Individuals with more than 25 professional bouts had an increased risk of CTE. Most started complaining in their 50s or 60s. Although mixed martial arts (MMA) fighters also had brain changes, they had less bouts and there were accordingly less MRI changes." MMA fighters now spar a great deal more, so I would expect more predisposition to CTE as time goes on.

I am hoping that Bradley, Martin and Estrada have retired sufficiently early to avoid the possibility of CTE that befalls so many. And hoping that trainers, family members, managers and, yes, promoters celebrate what a fighter has given in every battle, not expect the impossible, put their self-interests aside and admit it's not worth the risk to witness a glimmer of what the boxer once was. Too many boxers don't choose to retire on their own. As a former Nevada Athletic Commission Medical Advisory Board Chairman, I still have hope that commissions will accept that an important part of their role is to protect fighters from themselves beyond a win or loss and encourage retirement when necessary, before it's too late. RING

Dr. Margaret Goodman is a former Nevada State Athletic Commission chief physician, co-hosts the Fighter Health and Safety Podcast and is president of the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association.



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THE FACE OF BOXING

Leon Muhammad is Boxing

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

In recent years, boxing has been dominated by corporate types. Leon Muhammad is not a corporate type.

Leon has been in the sweet science for more than 50 years. In the mid-1970s, he worked for Butch Lewis. Then Lewis brought the Spinks brothers – Leon and Michael – to Top Rank, and Muhammad transitioned to doing odds-and-ends work for Bob Arum. A half-century later, he's still hustling to get what he can from promoters, matchmakers and fighters' camps.

"There's an inclination to dismiss Leon," Dave McWater (one of boxing's best managers) says. "But he has an unbelievable understanding of boxing. And whether people realize it or not, he's paying attention all the time."

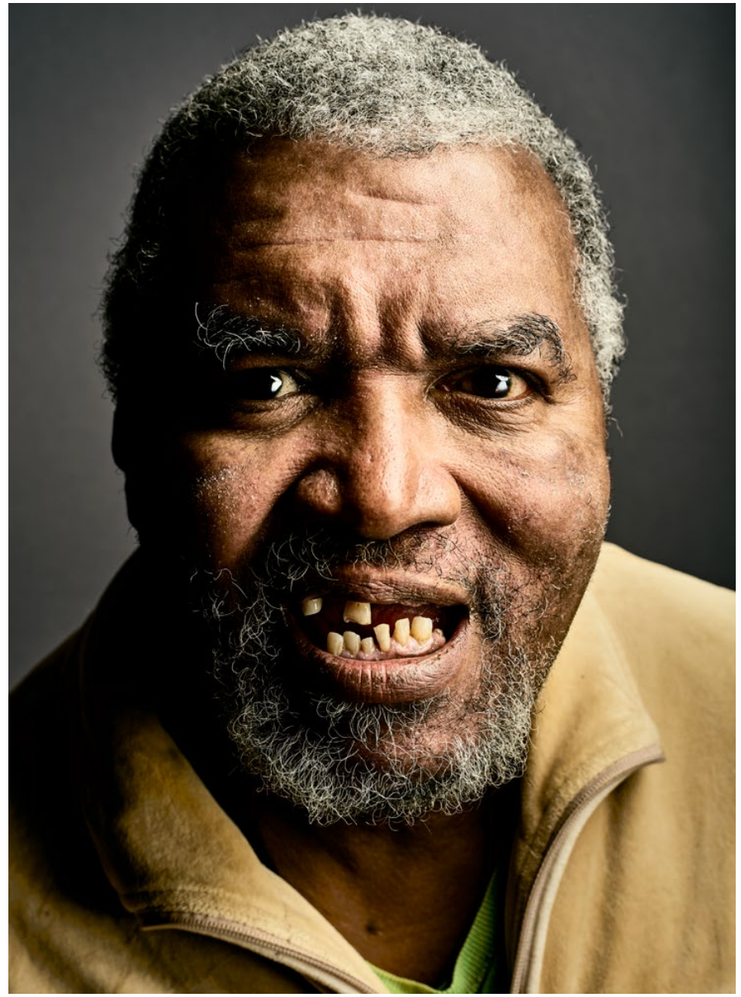
"Leon helped me a couple of times when I needed a fighter on late notice at the Blue Horizon," Hall of Fame promoter Russell Peltz recalls. "He's done that sort of thing for a lot of promoters over the years."

People like Leon.

* David Diamante: "Leon is always friendly. There's no pretense. He's one of those guys who has been around a long time and has seen different eras and different fighters and knows a lot about what's happening in boxing."

* Bruce Trampler: "I'm fond of Leon. He's got a good boxing mind. He's knowledgeable about what's going on. He has an amazing memory and can tell you about six-round fights that happened in Philadelphia 40 years ago."

* Don Turner: "Leon was always friendly to me. We weren't close. I don't know that he got close to anyone. But he's a good guy."



In 2016, Leon was inducted into the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame. One often hears the term "throwback fighter." Leon is a throwback boxing character and one of the people who make boxing what it is. RING

WBC President Mauricio Sulaiman announces the Grand Prix tournament in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

A NEW SOURCE OF STARS

By Randy Gordon

I love watching the WBC Boxing Grand Prix.

Held in the Global Theater in Riyadh City, it features fighters – the majority under the age of 25 – in four weight classes: featherweight, junior welterweight, middleweight and heavyweight.

The tournament began with 128 fighters in all. Thirty-two in each division in a single-elimination tournament. If you win, you move on. If you lose, well, you're out.

The round of 32 is over. Next will be the round of 16 in June. The quarterfinals will be contested in August, the semifinals will be held in October and the finals will be held in December. The bouts are being shown on boxing's busiest streaming platform, DAZN.

All the round of 32 bouts were six-rounders. In this tournament, there can be no draws. That's because judges are asked to employ an enhanced scoring system: They score rounds as close, moderate or decisive. No matter what the scoring system is (whether a 10-point must, a 5-point must, etc.), an extra point is given to the boxer who wins the round in impressive fashion, even without scoring a knockdown. Prior to 1988, New York State used this system, calling it supplemental points. The Grand Prix calls it alternative points. Same thing.

So, a "close" round can be scored 10-9. A more dominant round ("moderate") may be scored 10-8. A dominant round, with one fighter winning throughout the course of each of the bouts' 180-second rounds, can – and should – win it by a 10-7 score. A knockdown of the boxer who lost a "decisive" round may result in a score of perhaps 10-6.

I like that. I like it a lot. The problem I see is getting veteran judges, who are so used to scoring virtually every round 10-9 – or 10-8 if it includes a knockdown – are very hesitant, reluctant, apprehensive and even afraid ("Maybe the commission won't use me again if I score that round 10-6!"). If the round deserves to be scored 10-6, score it that way!

I used that type of scoring system in my first year as head of the New York State Athletic Commission, and it was met by loud protest from most of my veterans. I was forced to tell them, "Use my system or I won't be using you!" Most used it. Others found themselves retired.

Mark Robinson

Quality judges who know what they are watching will be able to use the system. Believe the WBC. Believe Turki Alalshikh. Believe me. This system works and will cut down the number of head-shaking decisions we have been seeing too much of.

Watch the WBC Boxing Grand Prix.

My two favorite fighters in the tournament so far are 11-0 (8 KOs) heavyweight Tsotne Rogava and power-punching 140-pounder Carlos Utria 10-0 (10 KOs) of Colombia. In his first bout in the WBC Boxing Grand Prix, Utria KO'd 9-0 Spaniard Elianel Guerrero in the second round. Only one other opponent has made it as far as Round 2 against Utria, who is just 21 years old.

Rogava, who comes from the country of Georgia, lives in California and is trained by Joe Goossen. Rogava stopped his opponent in the second round. At 32, he is among the oldest competitors in the tournament.

Keep watching.

There will be several future stars coming out of the Grand Prix!

★★★★

Speaking of DAZN, I – along with color analyst Henry DeLeon – will be on the mic for the July 25 installment of Boxing Insider Promotions' latest show from the Tropicana Hotel in Atlantic City. This will be promoter Larry Goldberg's fifth show at the Tropicana. His last one, on March 22, packed the house. Between the events in both Atlantic City and in NYC's Sony Hall, Boxing Insider Promotions has run around 17 shows in a little over two years.

Goldberg, who grew up in nearby Margate, attended Atlantic City High School. As a kid, he helped promoters put up posters of upcoming fights at Boardwalk Hall, The Sands, Resorts, Trump Plaza, Bally's and, of course, The Tropicana (where Don Elbaum ran nearly 250 fights cards between 1982-87). The one on July 25 will feature one of the hottest young fighters in the sport, super middleweight Marco Romero, as well as unbeaten heavyweight slugger Bruce Seldon Jr., the son of former WBA heavyweight titleholder Bruce Seldon.

Goldberg's success has piqued the interest of others who are now looking at the resurgent Atlantic City as a viable location. And Goldberg himself has become New York's busiest, most-talked about promoter (he was voted the 2024 "Promoter of the Year" by Ring 8, a charity helping former fighters and others). His next NYC boxing show was scheduled to take place on May 9 in Sony Hall, located in the heart of Manhattan's Theater District.

That card was to feature the debut of highly touted Puerto Rican lightweight Yandiel Lozano-Oquendo, who will be guided by Hall of Famers Shelly Finkel and Frank Warren.

★★★★

TWO GREAT READS: Hall-of-Famer Jim Lampley just authored a terrific book. It's called *It Happened!* and chronicles his rise from a kid with a dream of being a sportscaster to being recognized as one of boxing history's greatest blow-by-blow announcers.

Mark Kriegel, who has written books on Joe Namath (*Namath: A Biography*), Pete Maravich (*Pistol: The Life of Pete Maravich*) and Ray Mancini (*The Good Son*), now gives us the most in-depth life story of the legendary Mike Tyson in a two-book series called *Baddest Man: The Making of Mike Tyson.*

Both Lampley and Kriegel have scored sensational knockouts with these journalistic masterpieces.

★★★★

FIGHTERS NEEDING OUR HELP: Former light heavyweight and cruiserweight titleholder Bobby Czyz was diagnosed with neck, nose and brain cancer. He underwent extensive surgery, which doctors say was successful, and he is handling his treatment like the champ he is. What is out of control are his medical bills. Recently a fundraiser was held for Czyz in his hometown of Nutley, New Jersey. Hundreds of fans and boxing celebrities showed up to help Czyz – among those in attendance were Larry Holmes, Tim Witherspoon, Gerry Cooney, Chuck Wepner, Al "Ice" Cole, John Scully, middleweight contender Vito Mielnicki, Tommy "Razor" Rainone, former heavyweight contender/referee Randy Neumann, former two-division titleholder Junior Jones, former welterweight king Aaron "Superman" Davis, former middleweight champion Vito Antuofermo and former light heavyweight/heavyweight champion Michael Spinks.

Should you wish to donate (no amount is too small), make your check payable to:

Long Island Boxing Charities
15 Lloyd Street
Center Moriches, NY, 11934

(In the subject line, put "Bobby Czyz"). As Long Island Boxing Charities is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization, all donations are tax-exempt).

Iran "The Blade" Barkley, the former three-division titleholder and only man to beat Thomas Hearns twice, also needs our help. According to his best friend, Milton Luban, Barkley was recently diagnosed with lymphoma. As of this writing, Barkley's many friends in the sport were discussing how to help him with financial support.

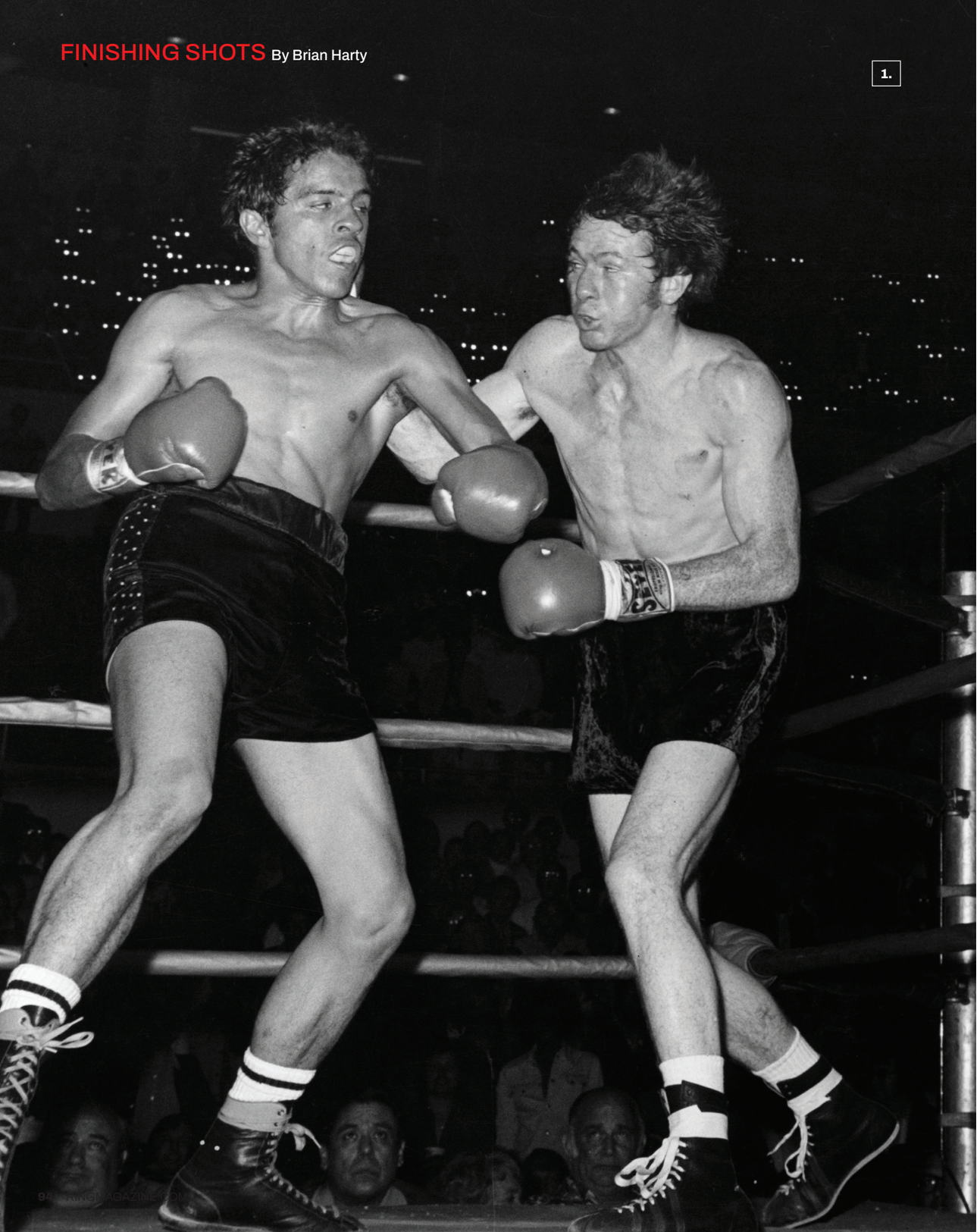
I am sure that by next month, I'll know exactly what's planned and will share it with you right here.

★★★★

Here comes the IBHOF Induction Weekend, only a few weeks away. I will be putting together a "Commissioner's Corner Diary" of every moment of the IBHOF Weekend from June 5-8.

I am sure I could write a book on what that incredible weekend in Canastota will be like during those four sure-to-be-memorable days! RING

FINISHING SHOTS By Brian Harty

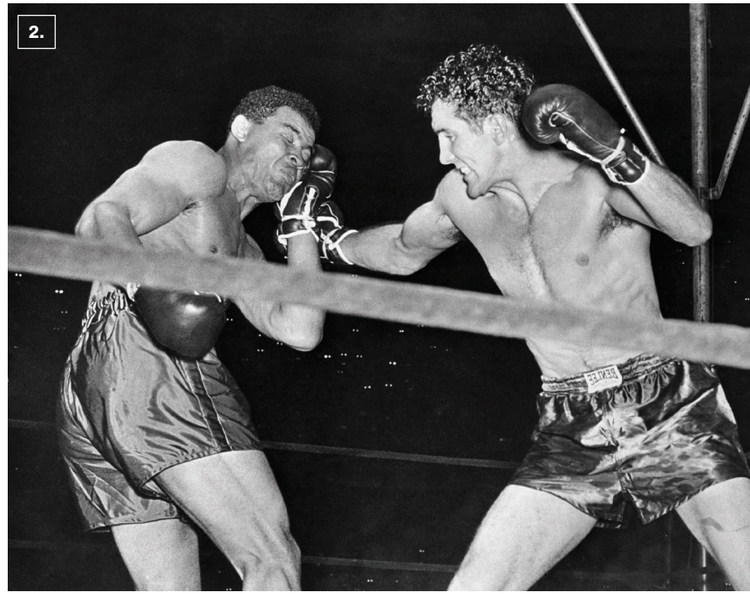


EVER FEEL LIKE YOU'RE BEING WATCHED?

One of the strange things you see in old black-and-white boxing photos is that the fights sometimes look like they're taking place in front of a starry nighttime sky. Even weirder, those "stars" come in pairs – a constellation of double pinpoints all tilted in the same direction. They're a bit like the headlights of distant cars gathered for a drive-in movie.

Today's safety commissions would frown on the idea of shining bright lights in the fighters' faces as they're trying to avoid getting punched, but photographers back in the day needed powerful flashes to record the action on film emulsion that was less sensitive than the megapixeled sensors of modern times. Combatants just had to deal with the inconvenience of being sporadically blinded while they worked. On the other hand, think how different Raging Bull would've been without the clank of exploding filaments, and how much those archaic safety hazards and the sight of a ring apron lined with photographers wielding two-handed cameras contribute to the cinematic allure of classic boxing. Even after the single-use glass grenades were replaced by less-incendiary electronic units, every attack in the ring came with its own fireworks display until different rules and digital equipment that didn't need flashes took over in the 21st century.

The slightly creepy side effect of those old flashbulbs was that whenever one went off and the angle was just right, everybody in the audience wearing glasses became a reflector. Every pair of spectacles became a twin supernova in the darkness. And thanks to those myopic fans, we have photos like these that connect a moment of action in the ring to the rapt attention of the people watching it happen. RING



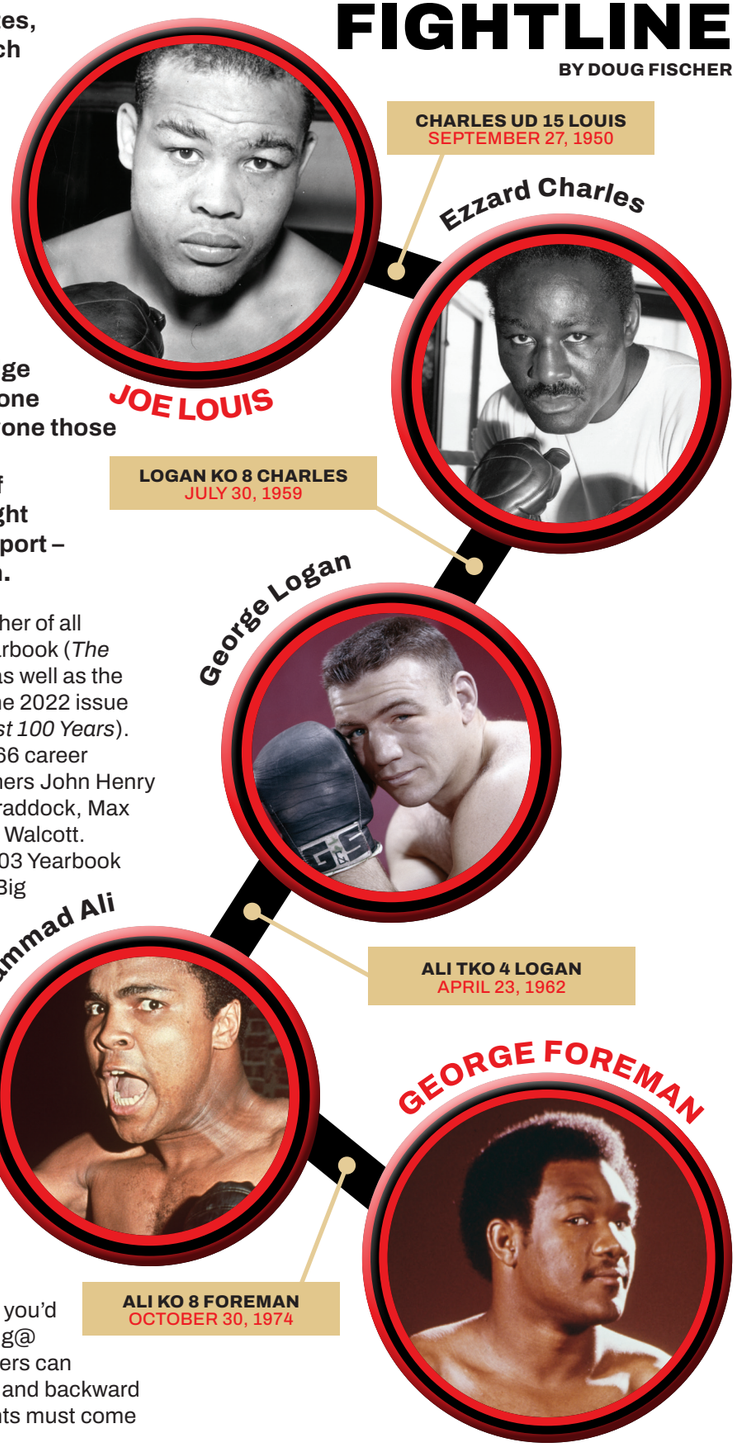
1. Bobby Chacon (left) vs. Danny Lopez, Los Angeles Sports Arena, February 24,1974. (Photo: The Ring Magazine)
2. Joe Louis (left) vs. Billy Conn, 1941 (Photo: Bettman/Getty Images)
3. Ruben Olivares (right) vs. Ernie Cruz, the Forum in Inglewood, March 17, 1969. (Photo: The Ring Magazine)

FIGHTLINE

BY DOUG FISCHER

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking two of the hardest-punching heavyweight champions in the history of the sport – Joe Louis and George Foreman.



Louis was selected as the best puncher of all time by The Ring: No. 1 in its 2003 Yearbook (*The 100 Greatest Punchers of All-Time!*), as well as the updated rankings presented in the June 2022 issue (*The 100 Greatest Punchers of the Last 100 Years*). The Brown Bomber scored 52 KOs in 66 career victories, including against Hall of Famers John Henry Lewis, Jack Sharkey, Max Baer, Jim Braddock, Max Schmeling, Billy Conn and Jersey Joe Walcott.

Foreman was ranked No. 9 in the 2003 Yearbook and No. 5 in the 2022 special edition. Big George scored 68 KOs in 76 career victories, including stoppages of Hall of Famers Joe Frazier, Ken Norton, Dwight Muhammad Qawi and Michael Moorer.

There are multiple paths linking the heavyweight powerhouses, whose primes are separated by almost 40 years, but we found this four-step Fightline – short and direct, like a Louis left hook or Foreman's shootouts with Frazier and Norton.

Can you find a faster route?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order.

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